

OMEN FOR A PRINCESS

THE STORY OF
JAHANARA
ROYAL POET OF THE
SEVENTEENTH
CENTURY



ELIAN BOWWELL

OMEN FOR A PRINCESS

*The Story of Jahanara, Royal Poet
of the Seventeenth Century*

by JEAN BOTHWELL

This is the story of a princess—Jahanara, who lived in India in the seventeenth century. The daughter of Prince Khurram, a leading contender for the Emperor's throne, she led an extraordinary life as artist and poet and manager of her father's household. Talented and beautiful, Jahanara was also very lonely. Her life must be devoted to serving her father for it was a rule of the land that Mogul princesses could never marry.

After she met Alam, a musician and courier of royal blood, Jahanara tried to convince her father and brothers that the rule must be rescinded. And when, at last, her father became Emperor, she was sure she would win the right to marry. But more sorrow and tragedy lay ahead and it took all of Jahanara's quiet strength to overcome it.

The author has skillfully recreated the court life of the times, full of romance and intrigue. The story of Jahanara is all the more fascinating because it is true, and though it happened more than three hundred years ago, a monument to it still stands—the tomb which Jahanara designed for her mother, Queen Mumtaz—the Taj Mahal.

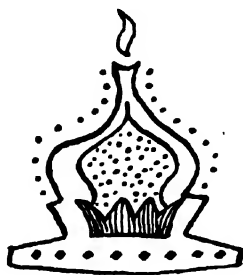
ABELARD  SCHUMAN

London New York Toronto

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LONDON NEW YORK TORONTO

1903



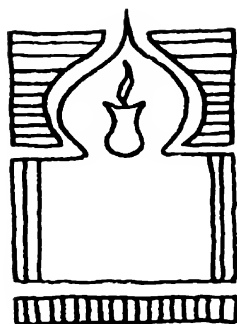
LONDON
Abelard-Schuman
Limited
8 King St. WC2

NEW YORK
Abelard-Schuman
Limited
6 West 57th Street

TORONTO
Abelard-Schuman
Canada Limited
896 Queen St. W.

Printed in the United States of America

**To
Carol McAfee Appleby
for countless reasons**



CONTENTS

Author's Note 9

Characters 11

ONE•A Falcon's Feather 13

TWO•Family Garden Party 29

THREE•Dara's Promise 44

FOUR•Jewels for a Princess 59

FIVE•Presentation at Court 70

SIX•Reward for Alam 83

SEVEN•The "Nine Days" Bazaar 99

EIGHT•Midnight Rider 112

NINE•Up the Hill and Down Again 125

TEN•Escape 141

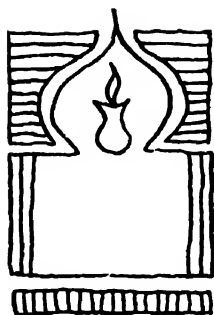
ELEVEN•Who Is To Be Emperor? 150

TWELVE•Shah Jahan, "Lord of the World" 163

THIRTEEN•A Builder's Dream 171

FOURTEEN•Dedication 182

A Final Word 189



AUTHOR'S NOTE

Jahanara and the other children in the family of the Emperor Shah Jahan and the Princess Mumtaz Mahall, the several grandparents and the Persian woman secretary are all historical characters. The others in the story have no real life counterpart in the record of the Mogul period in India. I have kept closely to the thread of history in this reconstruction of what palace life was like three hundred years ago, without the benefits of the modern comfort we know. They had jewels, yes, but they didn't have refrigerators, and travel by elephant and camel was painfully slow. . . . The Memoir (*the Ain-i-Akbari*) from which Jahanara learned the story of her forebears, still exists, in the original for scholars to pore over, and in copies for lesser scholars to pursue their researches.

❧ CHARACTERS ❧

JAHANARA, a Mogul princess

Her parents: PRINCE KHURRAM, afterward the Mogul
Emperor Shah Jahan

MUMTAZ MAHALL (*Ornament of the
Palace*) a Persian Princess

Her four brothers:

The Mogul PRINCES DARA

AURANGZEB (*Zebby*)

SUJAH

MORAD

Her two sisters: the PRINCESSES ROSHAN RAI and MERINZA

Her grandparents: ASAF KHAN, father of MUMTAZ MAHALL

The EMPEROR JAHANGIR, father of Shah Jahan
and

His second wife, NUR JAHAN, sister of Asaf Khan

Her teacher: SATI-UN-NISSA, a Persian widow, and secre-
tary to Princess Mumtaz

Her maid: SALIMA

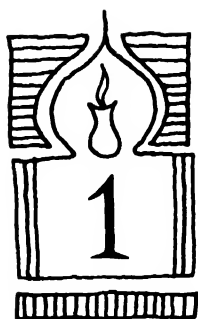
ALAM, a Trumpeter in Prince Khurram's household mu-
sicians

Courtiers at Agra, the Emperor's capitol

BIJA, a black Arabian horse

KHUMI, a baby elephant

Th' Emperor's Elephants
Step softly, step softly
And shake their saucy tails



A FALCON'S FEATHER

The year 1627 was a fateful one for many people in India, more particularly for a little group in Agra and nearby whose sole interest and destiny depended upon what happened at the Mogul court. Toward its end the year brought the close of life for one of that little circle, the old Emperor Jahangir, who left a great deal undone because he thought he had more time; and so his heirs had greater burdens in their own lifetime. Some of them were children.

Long before that, however, on a clear day in the warmth of early February, Jahanara, daughter of Prince

Khurram, who was the old Emperor's son, had her fourteenth birthday.

It was an especially significant day in her life because it marked her growing up. After her formal presentation to the Empress she would be expected to attend court affairs with her mother, and at home she would have her own room. According to family custom, aunts and cousins before her had gained those coveted privileges at thirteen. But hers had been withheld a year for a good reason, only good-seeming when the waiting was over. She had been completely rebellious at the time.

Because of the ceremony at court, any private recognition of Jahanara's great day must take place beforehand, if at all, so a family outing was planned. The excited girl was sure she would like the family affair better than the presentation. Her father, a general in the Imperial army, was not often at home, and he and his children had done little together in her fourteen years. None of them had experienced such an occasion as Prince Khurram had promised her.

So Jahanara rose a little earlier on the morning of the day before her birthday, with a single purpose in mind. Her precise, deliberate way led her via the stables, where she chose a horse to ride — without permission — and thence to a fine vantage point, already selected, from which to watch the entire assembly of the procession, which would eventually wind out of the main gates and down the road to Agra, five miles distant.

She took so long to choose the horse — a beautiful

black Arabian called Bija — that the courtyard was rapidly filling up when she rode out of the stable gate. Usually at this hour there was scarcely anyone stirring in the great gravelled square in front of the palace.

Smothered exclamations rose all round her, which she pretended not to hear.

"Look, the Lady Jahanara is riding Bija."

"What fool let that happen?"

"Where is the chestnut she usually rides?"

Out of the corner of her eye Jahanara saw the shrugged shoulder which went with the answer to the last question.

"'Tis none of our business. If the Lady Jahanara chooses Bija, then Bija it is."

Jahanara shrugged too, more in her mind than by any movement a watcher might see. It was wonderful to be fourteen, grown-up at last and able to make one's own decisions. Bija was doing very well, stepping along as if he knew what day it was. She headed him toward the spot which she had selected carefully the night before, when she surveyed the whole courtyard from the nursery balcony. Jahanara backed the black horse expertly and reined him in and noted swiftly that she had been right. She could see everything that went on, on three sides of the square.

She arranged her full trouser-skirt and her light cloak gracefully and comfortably. The bracelets on her arms fell together and separated, clashing musically with each movement. She sat back at ease in her saddle, intent upon the growing confusion all about her in the courtyard.

Her scarf of thin tissue only partially hid the emer-

alds in her ears and the long necklace of the same stones separated by pearls. The jewels enhanced the eager sensitivity in her oval, expressive face. She was poised, assured she could manage a difficult horse, and ready for the joy of the day.

Bija was not. He nickered and stamped impatiently, tossing his head as if to rid himself of the elaborate tassels decorating his mane. Jahanara began to see that he would require assurance from moment to moment that there was nothing to be afraid of in the bustling activity all about, in which he had as yet no part. Bija liked action and plenty of it — the stable men had warned — so she leaned to pat him and to whisper encouraging nothings, while she kept her own dancing eyes on the glittering scene.

Each group of new arrivals added to the color and the talk and the strong sense of something about to happen. A group of *omrahs*, the nobles who formed the house guard, walked up and down, up and down, near the palace steps. Their faces were blank — because they were trained to hide all feeling, so no one could tell what they were thinking — but anyone could see that they were more handsomely dressed than usual in bright, wide-skirted silk and velvet coats which reached to their knees, above tight-fitting trousers. The jewels in their smart, smooth-wrapped turbans and sword hilts were as dazzling in the sunlight as small short stabs of lightning in a storm. Their horses, held by stable boys at a little distance, pawed the gravel. The horses could show how they felt.

As Jahanara watched, a group of ten elephants, draped in gold-embroidered red velvet saddle cloths and

carrying canopied howdahs, ambled in from their stables. A baby of two years — Khumi, already known for his mischief — walked solemnly in front for a few paces and then scuttled back to his mother at a command from the chief keeper who was marshalling the elephants in a row to wait.

Khumi would work forward again when the man's back was turned, everybody knew. He was the pet of the whole stable crowd and many of the courtiers deigned to be amused at his antics. He was smart enough to trade on that affection.

Jahanara's mount did not share the general feeling. At the sight of the little elephant he did a side-step, and his twitching ears went up. "For shame, Bija, to be afraid of a baby!" She pulled the rein tight. "Stand, sir!" she commanded, sharply.

"If only the family would come out and we could start," Jahanara thought. A fly settled on Bija's neck and she reached to brush it away before he danced with annoyance. She began to regret a little that she had insisted on taking him out today. But a black horse was important to her plan — much more noticeable than the chestnut mare she rode every morning.

The gravel of the courtyard had been damped down so there was no dust. Instead, the smell of the wet stones mingled with a thread of smoke and from the formal garden opposite drifted the fragrance of opening roses. It was a wonderful smell and she sniffed it as if a new scent bottle had been opened for her special delight.

At her left and a little behind her a string of camels

knelt by the wide doorway leading into the staff quarters. When a group of young, noisy musicians appeared there, the whole courtyard seemed to quicken. The boys chattered and chaffed each other, pretending they were about to buy the camels and making outrageously high offers to each other to start the bargaining in bazaar fashion.

One of the musicians held a trumpet carelessly under his arm. He would blow it when the chief *omrah* signalled that everything was ready for the procession to start.

Except for the food baskets, everything looked ready now, Jahanara thought. Ah, well, they could have been sent with the tents and the canopies, gone these two hours down the Agra road in country carts. She had watched them disappearing out of the great gates, when she stood on her balcony at early prayer time.

So it was the family they were waiting for. If only they would come! Perhaps she ought to go back to the nursery and see what was causing the delay. But no, she reminded herself, firmly, her responsibility there was ended. She was fourteen — would be, tomorrow. The extra year she had spent with the children was over.

Without wishing it, that old conversation with her father, on the subject of that added year in the nursery, came back vividly, even while she noted that some of the *omrahs* were mounting.

Prince Khurram had been reasonable when he had proposed that she, Jahanara, the eldest of the seven children, should continue for one more year in her capacity as mother's helper in the royal nursery. He could have commanded rather than explained, because both he and his

daughter knew there could be no refusal. "We already ask a great deal of Sati," he had said, reminding her of the tutoring and the accounts, the managing of the nursemaids and the children's kitchen and the clothing for the seven, all of which her mother's secretary cheerfully performed.

Jahanara was ashamed now of her annoyance that they had such a large family. Sometimes they had fun together, when the boys didn't quarrel.

Movement across the courtyard caught her eye. The *omrahs* who had not yet mounted were forming a line on either side of the steps. Ah, the family, at last! But it was only the four young princes who acknowledged the *omrahs'* salute indifferently and sat down on the steps in a row to continue a conversation evidently begun inside. Their sister could not hear what they were saying, but she could guess. It was childish talk, always about the future, but Jahanara had an uneasy feeling that some of it was serious. Already they knew who the factions were at court and gossip constantly reached the nursery through the maids.

Zebby was the most persistent and definite of the four. He insisted that he was going to be a mullah and read the Qu'ran every day to those unable to read it, far away from any palace or army, meaning far away from the family, no doubt. He was already a solitary child, preferring for the most part to do things alone.

Dara, the eldest of the four boys and as near to Jahanara's heart as he was in age, was least vehement about ambition. And it wasn't because he was expecting to be

Emperor after his father. No one, indeed, had any assurance that Prince Khurram would ever succeed to the throne at Agra. There was no law of succession by the eldest son in the Mogul court. Back as far as a fourth-removed great-grandfather, the young adventurer Babar who had begun the dynasty in India, each Mogul Emperor had had to fight his way to the throne.

Jahanara closed her eyes for a moment in a wordless prayer that that need not happen to her father, and at the same time she knew heartache for the young brothers. They should be having a good time, and not be thinking such serious thoughts.

"Why couldn't we have gone together on an elephant, or on two, perhaps," she asked herself, "with a basket of food and without all these people, to some quiet place — a family all together and happy, just once?"

It amused her, imagining what would be thought of that idea, and she bent to whisper gentle scoldings to the restless Bija. He was doing very well, considering all the warnings, and she heedlessly let the rein go slack. Her head was bent, and she did not see Khumi wandering toward her across the wide courtyard.

But Bija saw, and because he had stood so long and didn't like elephants of any size, he reared and plunged abruptly and Jahanara would have had a bad fall if a hand had not sized her roughly, holding her in the saddle. Then somehow Bija came down from pawing the air and stood trembling, four feet on the ground.

Jahanara felt the hand release her. She was able to

push her scarf back out of her eyes and pull the rein up tight again before the awful shaking began in the pit of her stomach and spread to her arms and her lips, so that she knew she couldn't sit in the saddle one minute more. But no one must know how scared she had been by the sudden jolt, or she would be forced to give up Bija and her plan . . . they might even make her ride on an elephant. Oh no!

Someone was holding Bija's bridle, and when she slid off, very stiffly and ungracefully, she saw it was the young trumpeter. He smiled at her shyly, while continuing to soothe the horse, and asked, with concern, "Are you all right, my lady? You look . . ."

Jahanara nodded and held up a hand for silence, while she took a swift glance round the whole courtyard. No one seemed to have seen Bija's tantrum, at least at the moment no one was looking in this direction. They had another interest.

Khumi's mother, moved out of line by her mahout, met her baby in the middle of the courtyard and gave him such a sound smack with her trunk that he squealed shrilly with outrage. All the horses, thereupon, set up equally shrill neighing and became difficult to hold, so that the whole place was in an immediate uproar, with the stable boys' shouting added to the elephants' trumpeting. It ended only when the baby culprit was led back to the stables, battling every inch of the way, sliding on his fat little rump and scraping a wide path in the damp gravel.

Bija had not joined in the commotion, and Jahanara

reached for the rein. Her own trembling was subsiding and, though she was sorry for Khumi, she was grateful for the diversion his punishment had caused. She turned to the young man.

"Please help me mount? I do not want to attract attention."

His deft, graceful movement, knee bent at the right level for a step, and his hand where she needed it at the exact moment, surprised her. When she was back in the saddle, with the rein held properly once more, she said, "You saved my life, I think. What can I say? My feeling is hard to express."

He was a fair young man, with the rose-ivory tint in his complexion which meant good blood, and his face was the sort that shows too clearly, sometimes, its owner's moods and thoughts. He flushed now as he said, "It was nothing, my lady. You had a need and I was near. I am glad I was. You might have been killed, or had at least a bad fall. Your birthday could have been spoiled."

Jahanara nodded assent, gravely. "Tell me your name, please," she asked.

"It is Alam, my lady," he said, and his voice trembled a little.

Hm! No title, Jahanara thought, but then he wouldn't have one, a trumpeter in a group of musicians. His bearing bespoke a title. Odd! Aloud she said, "You are the one who could have been killed by Bija's hoofs. It was my fault. I let the rein go slack. I know better."

"Indeed you do, my lady, but you shouldn't have tak-

en Bija out this morning. There lies the fault. Did they not tell you at the stable that he doesn't like to stand? Where was your chestnut mare? Why did you not take her?"

"Bija was the only black one left," Jahanara explained and was promptly sorry. It sounded a silly reason. She should have chided the trumpeter for his bold rebuke. Now he'd wonder why a horse's color was important today. That was the whole thing. She *must* be riding a black horse when she saw her father. Everything would turn on that. She spoke again quickly to divert Alam's thoughts. "You seem to know about horses and particularly those I ride. How is that?"

There was a small twinkle in Alam's eye, far back, which she might have missed if the answer hadn't been important. Somehow, in that moment, it became very important and so Jahanara did not miss the amusement.

"I have seen you ride in the mornings," said Alam. "You have a good seat and you . . . you . . ."

Jahanara interrupted. "And this Bija? How do you know about him?"

Alam hesitated. "He has to be exercised hard daily. All know it. They let me . . . I have ridden him."

"A stable boy's job."

"Indeed, my lady, when there are enough stable boys who are not afraid of him. It is easy to make excuses when the *omrahs'* horses, two each, must be looked after as well. They shouldn't have let you take this Arabian today. Will you not make a change now, even yet? It is not too late."

But it was. His last words were loud in the sudden hush that fell on the courtyard. Prince Khurram and the Princess Mumtaz Mahall, followed by the rest of the family, now stood in front of the first row of pillars at the palace entrance. Their four sons rose, respectfully.

Jahanara smiled at Alam and started the subdued Bija across the courtyard to be nearer the family. Sati-unissa was there, standing behind the Princess, and they each had a little girl by the hand: Merinza, the baby, and pert Roshan Rai, soon to be six.

The elephants lined up in front of the steps and at command each knelt to take on its allotted passengers. The children mounted by stepping first on a massive hind foot. From there each rider pulled himself up by the stout tail under which was passed the crupper holding the howdah in place. The women preferred the light ladders set against the elephants' thick rumps.

When Dara's turn came, he hesitated, looked hard at Jahanara, frowned when he caught her eye, and took a step toward her; and then at some word from his father, he too mounted and the elephant swayed up and ambled off to its place in the procession, now forming near the main gate.

Jahanara watched breathlessly. Her father had seen her. Would her black horse have any significance for him? Would he now do what she was willing him to do with all her might? Was her plan to come out exactly as she hoped? Now was the time, if at all. Each parent would think she had asked the other to let her ride a horse today instead of sitting in a howdah. It was reasonable. The howdahs would

be too crowded, even with ten elephants to carry the whole party.

A horrible bubbling sound came from the side of the courtyard where Jahanara had been waiting so long. She looked round to see the musicians climbing aboard the camels. The beasts were protesting at having to get up and go anywhere after their long rest. It might have been amusing at any other time, but now she watched only long enough to see Alam's camel moving toward the gate. It would not be long before he received the chief *om-rah's* signal to blow his trumpet. Then they would start.

When Jahanara looked at her father again, she saw that his big black horse was being led to the steps. He sprang into the saddle and rode toward her and her heart leaped into her throat. Now! There was still time for him to order her down off her horse, and send her to join the others on the elephants. Would he? Or would he like her idea that a pair of black horses would look truly magnificent leading the procession together, especially if their riders were an Emperor-perhaps-to-be and his eldest daughter?

Prince Khurram was a tall man, and the beard he wore gave him even more dignity than his title. He looked down at her.

"Good morning, Jahanara, Birthday Princess! Haven't you found your place in line? I would have assigned it specially had I known you were riding a horse today. Surely you didn't take your usual canter? You are ready to go with us?"

Jahanara wasn't sure that there was a small smile un-

der his beard. But the thought of it made laughter bubble inside her and a sure knowledge with it that all was well. He was only teasing. He was going to invite her to ride with him. She said only, "I thought the howdah would be crowded."

"I see," said the Prince. He looked at her thoughtfully and smoothed his beard, while elephants and camels and *omrahs* waited, and a lone crow cawed from a tree in the garden, piercing the lengthening silence. Then an elephant moved somewhere up in front, and its bells chimed. The sound seemed to bring the Prince's thoughts back to the courtyard from wherever they had flown in the past ten seconds and he said, gravely, "You shouldn't be riding that horse, but I suppose we ought not to keep the rest standing while I send for another. Ah, I have only now noticed that your mount matches mine — both black. Excellent! In that case, will you allow me, Princess Jahanara, to escort you to Agra, properly at my side?"

"It will give me great pleasure, sire," said Jahanara demurely. She pulled the Arabian around to take her place at her father's right hand.

The chief *omrah* lifted his arm and the clear sweet trumpet notes reached every corner of the palace estate. Garden and stable boys and cooks — all the other people who were not going along — hurried out to see the procession start.

They arrived in time to see the Princess Jahanara ride proudly past the waiting elephants and go first through the gate beside her father. They did not note her attempt

to wave at her brother Dara nor see the disappointment on her face when he ignored it.

The mahouts brought the elephants in smartly behind the two black horses and the company of nobles followed, one group a little behind the Prince and others alongside the elephants, their faces blank, the pennants on their staffs fluttering in the light breeze.

Out on the road, Jahanara settled into her saddle happily, contented that her plan had succeeded. It was five miles to Agra from this palace in Sikandra. Five wonderful miles to have her father all to herself! Five miles of good talk, perhaps, if Prince Khurram was in the mood and not thinking about something at court or on one of their estates. Even if they didn't talk, she was in the place she had hoped to be, beside her father.

Bija was behaving well, now, probably because he was enjoying action. Silly little horse. It was true, as Alam felt, she might have been killed. Somehow she must make an opportunity to see Alam before the day was over and explain to him so that he wouldn't make trouble for anyone at the stable. Their talk had ended so suddenly when her father appeared, that there hadn't been time to caution him about that. It might be thought unseemly for a princess to be seen talking to a trumpeter, but he bore himself as nobly as any *omrah* and he had saved her from at least a dreadful fall, if nothing more. Perhaps she ought to tell her father about the whole thing and ask him to commend the boy. But that would make complications, because it would surely come out, then, that Mumtaz Mahall, her

mother, had not given permission — because she hadn't been asked — to allow her eldest daughter to ride horseback today.

She felt something brush her cheek and putting up a hand to remove it, found a perfect short feather clinging to her glove. It had evidently been shed from a falcon's wing, a creamy white one with a brown arrow of color dividing it half-way from the tip. Somewhere nearby the bird had stooped, seeing a rich prize, and the ensuing struggle for its breakfast had loosened the feather. A falcon was swift and sure and true and went to its mark like an arrow in the hand of a skilled archer. To Jahanara it was an omen, that feather. Nothing now could spoil this lovely day, even if her guilt were found out. Somehow Alam would be rewarded royally and she herself need not suffer punishment.

Tomorrow she would be fourteen and be rid of children's cares — at least until she had a baby or two of her own. Great-grandfather Akbar had made a rule that Mogul princesses were not to marry, because their consorts might want equality with the sons of the family. That had been a long time ago. Surely it would be set aside now, particularly if her father should become Emperor.

She twirled her feather thoughtfully, and felt rising in her heart a tide of excitement and anticipation that she had never before experienced. The feather was truly an omen. Her plan had succeeded. She would succeed with other things, too. It would be a happy day.



FAMILY GARDEN PARTY

The dust was so thick in the roadway that the two horses' hooves made scarcely any sound. The tall black horse and the Prince's figure provided a welcome shade for Jahanara on the small, dancing Arabian.

Only pleasant country noises, birds calling and the voices of peasants in the fields, interrupted the companionable silence between Jahanara and her father. For the first time in her life the young girl began to realize that two people who like each other can be together happily without saying a word. She had experienced uncomfortable silences before. This was different.

They passed a field where some farmer folk sat under a tree, eating a noonday meal. Jahanara was startled that it was so late, but a swift glance upward showed the sun almost at the zenith. They had delayed so long in the courtyard at Sikandra that it would be high time for their own meal when they arrived at the garden.

A woman with a young child — a boy who looked as if he might be Dara's age — and two men rose and bowed as the Prince and his daughter came abreast. No doubt the woman had walked out to the field with the food from the village which was huddled among mango trees a half-mile back from the road.

Prince Khurram acknowledged the people's greeting and Jahanara remarked, "If we were of their state, we could eat outdoors as they do without taking along almost an army."

Her father looked down at her affectionately. There was laughter in his voice when he said, "You could change places with a girl from one of these families if you like. I could arrange it."

Jahanara's hand tightened on Bija's rein. "Father, you don't mean it. I'd have to . . . I mean, I couldn't leave . . ."

"The children?" he suggested. "But you left them this morning to their own concerns, and very happily, while you went about yours. Indeed, my daughter, because you did that, I almost cancelled today's arrangements."

"Father!" Jahanara was dismayed, but relieved, too, that he hadn't guessed it was he she minded most leaving.

He looked at her solemnly. "We delayed the start because no one could find you. And all the time, I suspect, you were sitting that skittish horse and wishing we would hurry up. Your mother knew nothing of your plans, so I assume you did not ask her permission to ride a horse to-day. Nor Sati's."

Jahanara's face burned but she looked at her father bravely. "I wanted it so much, and I was afraid I would be refused, if I asked anyone."

How could a loyal daughter speak of her innermost heart's desire — to be near, as often as possible, to a father she adored and was so proud of? There was reason for her pride. Surely he would be the next Emperor of India and sit at Agra. None of Grandfather's sons had such grace and dignity and such skill in horsemanship, such a way with animals, with accounts, and in his dealings with all sorts of people among his father's subjects.

Prince Khurram had to lean far down from his saddle to hear Jahanara's low-spoken reply.

"Your refusal would have been hardest to bear."

He made no reply and after a while he saw her shake her head angrily to remove tears she was too proud to wipe away. They moved him to say, musingly, "You could not know that I was planning this very thing and . . ."

"Father!" Her smile as she looked up at him was radiant.

"Oh, yes, though not as far as riding on matched mounts. That fine point did not enter my head, but I like this proof of your artistry. Take care, Jahanara, rein him

up! That trumpeter is too far behind to rescue you a second time."

"How did you know? You were inside . . . searching for me, you said."

"Ah, and happened to see you from the nursery balcony, when we finally decided you were not in the palace. Tell me the young man's name. I must commend him. A friend of yours, is he? You talked to him so long, it made me think he might be."

Jahanara was thinking about Alam and so did not hear the sarcastic note in her father's voice, but when she glanced up she saw that he was angry. His moods could change swiftly. Now she was on the defensive and nervous and said more than she might have done, otherwise.

"Father! I never saw him before today. His name is Alam, he told me. I think he is . . . better . . . or comes from . . . rather, he has more skills than a trumpeter might be expected to have. He understands horses. He has ridden Bija, helping the stable boys, so he says. If he is a noble without an estate could, he not be transferred to the *omrah* guard? Then he would have two horses. It would be a fitting reward for what he did. I was warned about Bija but I was careless and could have had a bad fall. May it please you, sire?"

"Did he tell you to say that? It could have been planned," Prince Khurram was curt.

Jahanara said, indignantly, forgetting respect, "That was a cruel thought, sire. No one knew I would choose to sit just where I did, to watch . . . to look at . . ."

"You mean to watch for me to come out." The fine beard parted in a wide grin, the anger consumed. "Yes, yes, go on, daughter. Did you know the musicians would assemble at that gate?"

"Nay, Father. My only plan was to watch for you. The accident was my own fault, as I have said — my own bad horsemanship. There was Khumi, of course. *He* got a spanking."

"I heard about that, poor little beast."

They rode another furlong before Prince Khurram spoke again. He said, "Very well, daughter. Upon your word, which I have never before doubted, Alam will be transferred to the *omrah* corps if he proves worthy in all other respects. I shall talk to him tomorrow."

Jahanara was relieved and laughed, unexpectedly, asking a saucy question. "What if the young man prefers to stay with the musicians and blow his trumpet? How much may it matter if he begs to be allowed to refuse the transfer? Or, what if I had made no plans and had asked to be excused from riding beside you when you invited me?"

Prince Khurram smoothed his beard once more and looked down at his daughter, quizzically. "Must I remind you, after fourteen years, that I am master of my household, though I am more often away from it than in it? Alam will be transferred, if he is worthy; and you would be here, riding beside me, as I wished it. I will not have my orders questioned nor my invitations refused."

Jahanara struggled with tears again. Now she knew that all her scheming of the morning had been wasted.

Her first effort at birthday independence and grown-up freedom hadn't mattered a jot. Her father had spoken as if he were already Emperor, all-powerful, a true Mogul. And she felt more certain that he would be, no matter how he might come to the position. One day, by the hand of Fate, because she was his eldest, she would be first Princess of the court. It would not be an enviable place, unless it gave her the right to ask him to set aside that old rule about princesses not marrying. Even if he might be willing, the request would be meaningless unless there was someone she cared for enough, someone she could name. Until to-day she had never spoken to any man who was not a relative or a servant.

She realized now that she had liked talking to Alam. He could be a good . . . friend . . . that was her father's word, spoken in contempt because Mogul princesses didn't have men friends. As Prince Khurram had used it, the word was a sneer. How could a father be such a comfortable companion and in the next breath seem a cruel tyrant?

Rajah Jai Singh's garden at Agra — where the Taj Mahal, the tomb of Jahianara's mother now stands — was only a pleasant greensward dotted with ancient banyan and a few feathery neem trees along the Jumna River on that pleasant February day.

Prince Khurram's cavalcade passed through the town and skirted the great red sandstone fortress built by Akbar, and so continued by the river road to the garden. The

gold and red-patterned tops of the tents, gleaming among the trees as they approached, guided them to the chosen spot.

In the time allotted, the carters and experienced workmen who had gone before had set up an elaborate camp for the day.

There was a stable tent for the animals, and rich smells from the kitchen tents. The four boys shouted and went running that way as soon as their elephant knelt. Their father's secretary, who had accompanied them, collared Dara in six paces and called to the others to come along to the men's dressing tent to wash themselves. They went, grumbling, the sound becoming indistinct, mingled after a moment with other voices as Jahanara listened.

She was glad to dismount and allow Bija to be led away, while she stood and regarded the whole scene. The sounds, the movement of people, the sunlight on the tents made it seem like one of their court plays. But instead of the heavy perfumes and incense so noticeable there, the fishy smell from the river and bruised grass and elephant tang were substituted. She breathed in a deep lungful, happy and hungry.

"Nara, why did we come out here?"

Roshan Rai's little face was puckered and her sticky hands, which clutched one of Jahanara's smooth palms, felt feverish. "My stomach feels funny. Our elephant rocked. I didn't like riding on him. What do we do now? Are you going to tell us some stories today?"

"I might, after we have our food. This is my birthday party, remember? Come with me now and Salima will give you a cool drink and then wash you clean so that you may eat well."

"We could have stayed at home," said Roshan, sulkily, as she trailed along beside Jahanara toward the women's pavilion. "If your party had to be outdoors, we could have sat by our waterfall in the garden. Then I could have played with my gazelle and fed it. Sati wouldn't let me bring him." Her complaints ended in a sob.

"Sati knew your poor little pet wouldn't enjoy the elephant ride, any more than you did. There now, stand still and I'll make you feel better."

Jahanara smoothed the tangled hair back from Roshan's hot, anxious forehead and released the edge of her thin veil, caught in the small gold circlet in the child's ear. "After Salima washes you, you can have some good pigeon pilao and some sweet cakes with sherbet. Wouldn't you like that?"

"All but the washing," said Roshan, stubbornly. "A party is to have a good time, so why must I wash my hands?"

"Because they are dirty."

Roshan held out both hands and laughed. Moisture and dust had made dark lines across both palms.

"All right, I will wash. But why do I keep on getting dirty?" Having submitted, she chattered gaily through the vigorous scrubbing cheerfully administered by Salima, Jahanara's smiling maid.

When it was over, Roshan refused to wear her veil. Instead, she slowly folded the length of airy, spangled silk over and over, down to the size of a handkerchief.

"I will not need this now," she said, handing it to Salima. "I am going to play with Zebby after I eat, and it gets in my way. He will play with me today, I think. Zebby is the brother I like best and he likes me."

Jahanara caught up one plump little hand and pulled the child's red velvet vest smoothly down over the round stomach, to cover the gathered top of her full green silk trousers. "We all like you, darling," she said. "Come along now and we'll eat."

The rich fragrance of spicy food had grown stronger by the time the whole family, with the two secretaries, came together under a large *shamiana*, set in the shade of a tall tree near the river bank.

It was really a huge peaked canopy made of quilted material thick enough to protect them from the sun. It was held up by silver poles at the four corners and a fifth, taller one, in the middle. Golden ropes stretched to the tent stakes to keep it upright.

On the grass beneath the canopy, thick pads laid edge to edge were covered with beautiful carpets. It was like a palace floor at Sikandra. And the piles of cushions around the long low tables were the same. Silver dishes and goblets shone in the sunlight, and there were bowls of fruit in the same bright hues as the cushions and carpets.

The family was scarcely seated, after a prolonged argument on the boys' part as to which side of the table was

better, before the parade of food-bearers began. They passed covered dishes full of rice, fish, pigeons and pheasants, with hot bread and many sauces.

It was a slow meal, deliberately eaten, with some waiting between courses, and it lasted two hours. Merinza fell asleep long before they reached the bowls of fruit. Roshan Rai looked after her longingly when the nurse carried her away, but she stubbornly kept to her place by Jahanara, waiting for the stories she hoped would come, or her father's songs.

Jahanara was enjoying the feast, tasting a little of each dish that was offered, because she knew it would be reported in the kitchen and the cooks would be pleased. Most of all she enjoyed the pheasant with a hot, sweet pickle. She wondered, as the meal progressed, where the musicians were. If they had not been meant to play in the *shamiana*, of what use had it been to bring them along? Nothing had been said about dancing or entertainment. Perhaps they could come later and accompany her father's singing. He liked to sing, but his children did not hear him often, and it would be a special treat today. Surely he would give his family that pleasure.

More than any of the other children except Dara, perhaps, Jahanara had enjoyed their father's singing. She loved the exciting way he threw his head back when he sang — court poets' songs about beautiful roses poured forth, and nursery ditties, and even wild war songs occasionally. The beautiful Mumtaz often lifted a hand and stopped those. But as the children grew older and the fam-

ily larger, Prince Khurram came less and less often to the nursery. Sometimes, when he had just returned from a journey for the Emperor, it was too late at night, and sometimes he wasn't in the mood, or was too weary. It had so happened that they hadn't heard him once since they had come to Sikandra to live a few months before.

Then Jahanara's retrospect was interrupted. Sweet and far away, a trumpet blew. And then they all heard singing, men's voices, with the strings plucking beneath the words and growing louder.

Roshan Rai and Jahanara and their mother, with Sati-un-nissa, had been seated on the side of the table looking upriver, and Roshan stood up at her place crying excitedly, "There, I see it. It's coming here! Grandfather's barge."

So it was. With whipping flags it was moving slowly round the bend in the river, from the direction of the fort. The rowers' oars on both sides shone in the sun in one rhythmic move and dipped in the river the next.

Though it was the Emperor's barge, the musicians were their own, who had come that morning, riding out of Sikandra on camelback to be with the feasters. The camels must have stopped at the fort when the procession passed, by arrangement, and no one had noticed; no one had known, save one, Prince Khurram. He was the planner, the maker of pleasure.

Jahanara looked at her father; and he was looking at her, and he nodded and smiled. He was pleased with his surprise. Nothing, not even his eldest daughter's tacit disobedience, would have made him postpone this day. He

had looked forward to it as much as the children had. That meant, possibly, that the good omen she had found in the feather was for something still to come, perhaps far in the future. Or in the trumpeter's? Or both together? Alam. She liked the name, but why should she think so much about a young man she had seen for the first time only that morning? A trumpeter, too, not a prince. She shrugged all thought of him away and gave her attention to the approaching barge.

It came steadily on, drew in to the shore, and the rowers' oars came up in salute as the royal boat was anchored. The musicians were served some food, and after a while their singing began again and continued at intervals to the end of the meal. Sometimes there were no words for the songs, only the strings and drums playing wild lonely desert chants, or shepherds' twilight pipings on single reeds.

At the end, Roshan, with no awe of her princely father, rose again in her place and demanded that he sing the song about the wild gazelle. "It isn't about my gazelle," she explained earnestly, "but it's a nice song."

The prince was plainly surprised, and even looked a little bit embarrassed. "But my child," he protested, "how do you know about that song? It is scarcely a nursery tune."

"But you know how to sing it," young Roshan insisted. "I heard you do it, once. It's a good song. I liked it."

Her mother, smiling quietly behind her sheer veil, shook her head at the child and tried to pull her down onto

her cushions while Jahanara helped on the other side. But they couldn't put Roshan off. Her clear little voice reached to the boat, and the musicians' chuckles were unmistakable. One of them, audaciously, began to pluck his strings and a thread of tune crept under the canopy. Mumtaz Mahall lost her dignity and her shoulders shook with laughter.

Roshan said, just before she finally capsized on her cushions, "You sang it to Mother one night on the balcony and I was awake and I heard and if it was a love song, you can sing it again, my father. You love us, too."

Prince Khurram looked down the table at Roshan and rose and bowed to them all. Then he turned and nodded to the musicians, and the thread of tune became full harmony, for a singer who loved to sing, imploring a wild doe to come to his, the hunter's, heart. It was after a heavy meal, but the prince's children were not skilled critics and, as Roshan said, they liked the way he sang. But he ran out of breath at last, and the singing ended and with it, the feast. The afternoon lay ahead.

The table-bearers came once more and cleared everything away, down to the last bowl of fruit and shining goblet. Everyone stood about, watching them and wondering what was to come next, Jahanara more interested than any of the children. She herself hadn't given much thought to details of her birthday party. It had been enough for her that they'd have an outing together. Now, with part of the afternoon still ahead of them, she began to be apprehensive for the younger ones' sake.

They had looked forward to this time even more than to the "Nine Days" Bazaar which would occur at court toward the end of the month. That was a public occasion, with great glitter and crowds of people. This was different — something for the family. Would the feather's promise still hold, or would it be a disappointment?

It seemed to be. The long table became three smaller ones. Two were set in different parts of the tent, one on either side without any audible orders and the third was carried away, outside.

Prince Khurram had been talking quietly to his secretary while the rearrangement was taking place. Now he turned to his children and said briskly, quite as if he might be a little glad that the morning and its many arrangements were over and done with, "Your mother and I have some work to do. How would you like to go on the barge for a ride down river? It is planned for you if you'd like. Perhaps Nara is the one to decide, because this is her party today."

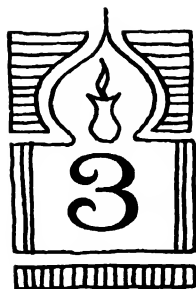
He looked at her for approval. He had given her no choice, no idea what might happen if they didn't ride downriver, so what else could she do but fall in with the plan? The secretaries were already spreading out papers on the tables and the *shamiana* area had now somewhat the look of a palace room at Sikandra set up for practical use. Why couldn't her mother have left behind her for one afternoon her responsibility for many charities, and the accounts that went with it?

Jahanara smiled at her father and kept her disappoint-

ment to herself. She nodded to the children, who took that for their release. They had become accustomed to her authority in this year she had helped in the nursery. She was glad they did not argue. The three younger boys left the tent with a wild whoop and Roshan followed them, running, down the bank where four oarsmen were waiting to hand the party aboard the barge.

Dara stepped to Jahanara's side and offered her his arm, as any polished courtier might, and brother and sister walked sedately together over the green grass in the afternoon sunlight.

Neither of them realized that the talk they would have on the Emperor's royal barge that afternoon would become a part of Mogul history.



DARA'S PROMISE

The Emperor's barge was cushioned and carpeted too, with a canopied top. Only the bow was left free and clear of its shade. In the stern there was a graduated grouping of padded seats, like steps, for the musicians, separated from the rest of the space by a carved wood railing, with a little swinging door in it.

As soon as Jahanara and Dara came aboard, the oars went up in salute again to Prince Khurram, who stood on the river bank, watching the departure. Up to that moment Jahanara had hoped he might change his mind about work and come with them.

She looked to see what each child was doing before

finding a place for herself. It was mechanical, instinctive — the same thought a mother might have when out with a family of children. The past year of responsibility in the nursery had added to her natural, constant consciousness of what it meant to be the eldest of seven. She sometimes wondered if her mother had as much concern for them. It didn't seem so, today.

Roshan's hand crept into Jahanara's while she watched to see what Aurangzeb meant to do, before she chose her own place to sit. She already had a well-fed drowsy look on her little face and when it appeared that Aurangzeb had no intention of doing anything but pleasing himself, she chose a pile of cushions as near to him as possible and curled up for a good sleep.

Aurangzeb had pulled a small book out of his wide green cummerbund and was already buried in it, paying not even token attention to anyone, least of all to Roshan, who had expected so much of him. Of course he couldn't talk to a child sound asleep, Jahanara made grudging excuse for him, but he hadn't tried by any device, either game or talk to keep her awake, either.

Morad was already sitting by a rower and demanding a chance to help. He was noisy about it. If he became too much of a nuisance he would have to be given something else to do. Sujah was eyeing the musicians. Whatever he did, he wouldn't cause trouble. He was an amiable boy and Jahanara's heart warmed to him, next to Dara.

The salute was taken. The oars dipped. The barge began to move slowly away from the bank. Jahanara waved

to her father and felt the increasing motion of the boat so that she swayed awkwardly until she felt Dara's hand under her elbow. He guided her to the bow, where, down one step, were places for two people. They could sit comfortably and see everything, either straight ahead or on both sides of the river, though there wouldn't be much to see in any direction because the land hereabout was flat and weedy in some places, but the occasional golden fields of mustard in full flower made up for the rest of the dreary plain.

Jahanara's thoughts were troubled. Couldn't grown-ups be free, for one day out of a whole year? When it was their eldest daughter's birthday? Couldn't anyone do as he pleased, ever? But it might be that her father and mother enjoyed bringing their work along on a family outing. It was a puzzle, being free. She had thought this morning that she, herself, was, but it hadn't appeared that way, later.

She was glad when Dara turned and asked the leader of the musicians to play. That brought Alam back to her mind, and she felt a duty stirring in her conscience to warn him of her father's displeasure if he should dare to refuse the transfer to the *omrah* corps. No sensible person would refuse, but she had a feeling he should be prepared. He didn't seem a humble person, now that she thought of the morning's scene. There he sat, such a short distance away from her, yet how far removed by custom. It would be unheard of for her to leave her place and go and speak to him, yet she must, somehow, before the day's outing was over.

If asked later, Jahanara couldn't have named the tunes that accompanied their quiet afternoon's drifting.

At first she only half listened, dreamily, until Dara said, "They say so much that one doesn't know what to believe. If I asked Father about it he would advise me not to worry my head about the future. But I do worry about it."

If Dara had worries, she ought to help him, Jahanara thought. So she stirred out of her daydream and said, "Who are 'they,' Dara, and what worries you? Do you want to tell me?"

"You are the only one I can tell. It's about Grandfather. The *omrahs* talk, and so does Father's secretary, and the stablemen. You can hear a lot, if you are a boy, around the animals, and if you listen. It began when Zebby and I had to stay at court, two years ago, in Father's place, when he was exiled. I can't believe all the horrible things people say about the Emperor now. He was good to us. The gossip is that he has a sickness, and that he will never be well of it. I keep wondering if he will ride on this barge again, on this river."

Jahanara was startled. "That news hasn't reached the nursery maids yet. D'you think he is ill enough that they mayn't have my presentation party tomorrow?"

"Oh, it's not that bad. They'll have your party. The Lady Nur Jahan likes parties. But I feel sorry for the Emperor. I wonder if he will mind dying very much. I mean, when the time comes. That's when you think of all the dreadful things you've done in your life and wish you hadn't."

"Dara, I won't listen. Those are awful thoughts to have on such a lovely day."

"But I wonder about things all the time," he persisted. "When Grandfather is gone, will Father be the next Emperor?"

"If Allah wills it," said Jahanara, fervently. "But Father will have to help bring it about. Especially because he and Grandfather haven't been friends lately. Every Emperor of our line has had to fight for his right to rule. It will be the same thing over again for Father."

"Then I must, in my turn," said the boy, bleakly.

Jahanara pleaded again. "Don't think about it any more, Dara. You have a lot of time yet. You are only twelve years old. Father has half his life, at least, ahead of him. He is only thirty-five and he seems happy. You are thinking grown-up thoughts now. Stop it!"

"But something could happen to Father! Or . . . or to me. Even if we haven't right of succession by the eldest son, I'd like to come after Father, if he becomes Emperor, and help him before that. I can't think of anything in the future but being Emperor. It would be wonderful to be as certain as Zebby is, about what he is going to be."

Jahanara lowered her voice. "I want you to be Emperor some day, quite as much as you do. And I think Father wishes it, too. You are fitted for it. You have the manner. But watch out for Zebby. He declares he wants to be a *mullah*, but how do we know he isn't reading up on military schemes in all those books he pores over and carries around? Have you ever looked inside one?"

Dara shook his head and exclaimed, "That child! He's barely ten years old, Nara. And he is my brother. If one can't trust a brother, who else is there?"

"Oneself, as our sires Babar and Akbar learned long ago," Jahanara reminded him. "That is my best counsel," she said, fiercely, then added, "you know you will always have me, wherever we are." She laid her hand comfortingly on his arm. "Look, the shadows are lengthening. We ought to turn around. Will you please give the order? I must see what the children are doing."

Roshan Rai still slept, and both Morad and Sujah grinned at her from behind an oar and the rower in charge of each beamed, proud that the young princes had shown such spirit.

The trumpet tootled off key, missed a note and came in too fast on the next, so Jahanara knew that Alam had been watching the bow of the boat instead of the beat of the music. She returned to her place hurriedly so that he could not tell by her face that she had noticed.

The boat turned broadside to the current with some shipping of water from feathered oars, and then faced back the way they had come. Peasants were leaving their fields, ending the day. It would be time for the family to start back home when they landed. The day had gone too fast, but it wasn't over yet. There was the loveliness of the sunset to come and there was still time to comfort Dara, a little, if she could.

"I am afraid, too, sometimes," she began, "when I think only a few years ahead. Because I am a girl, my fears

are different from yours, but they are as important to me."

"You!" Dara exclaimed. "What have you to fear? You are the oldest and Father likes you best of all of us. He makes no secret of it. Who rode with him today? In a way, that was my place beside him at the head of the procession."

"So that bothered you? Was that why you did not look at me when I passed your elephant? Oh Dara, for pity! I was asked because tomorrow is my birthday."

He looked a bit shamefaced when he admitted his feeling. "But I will have my turn later."

"Indeed you will," said Jahanara, "and I shall be happier than anyone to see it. I'd give you my place in everything, Dara, for just one thing I want. If only somehow our Great-grandfather's cruel law, forbidding Mogul princesses to marry, can be revoked! I want to marry, Dara, when the time comes, and have a little family of my own — strong sons and sweet little girls like Roshan Rai and Merinza."

"Stubborn little girls like Roshan, you mean." He grinned at her. "But if it means so much, I give you now my solemn promise that if you or I can't get Father to revoke it, then I will, when I am Emperor."

"It could be too late then," said Jahanara, "but I thank you with all my heart, Dara. That decree was wrong."

"I wonder why it was done," Dara said, idly.

"Perhaps it was because a princess might marry some-

one who would ask for an equal place with her brothers and interfere in family matters," said Jahanara.

She did not add another thought which had never before occurred to her — that a Mogul princess who had no hope herself of ruling, ought surely to be allowed to marry whomever she pleased, and it shouldn't matter if he was an *omrah*, or even a lesser person . . . she would not let the sentence complete itself in her mind.

Roshan Rai, Light of Princesses, woke up, rosy and sweet from sleep, but the sweetness changed to temper in the moment it took to observe that Morad sat at an oar on one side and Sujah on the other, each proudly helping a boatman to pull it. She stood up, crying out to Morad to give her his place.

Morad did not move. Nor did Sujah.

All the rowers looked at their chief and he saw no other man willing to let the little girl sit by his oar. Instead, shock was plain on their faces. It would not be seemly for a princess to help row the barge.

Roshan screamed and stamped her foot.

Jahanara left her place and went to soothe the angry child. "Rowing is not for girls," she said, and saw the chief oarsman nod.

Roshan would not accept that and appealed to her brother. "Zebby," she implored. "Make them let me! I want to do it, too. I can do what Morad can. Zebby!"

Aurangzeb closed his book and tucked it back into his bright sash. He looked at Roshan with disgust and he

sounded like an old man when he spoke. "There are some things it is not seemly for girls to do. You are a princess, a Mogul princess. Conduct yourself like one." Then he turned his back on her.

Roshan hid her face in Jahanara's skirts and wept, as much for the rejection as for the disappointment about rowing. With some difficulty Jahanara got the child to come and watch the river winding away from them. But Roshan refused any entertainment and wept the rest of the way back to the garden landing.

"Zebby was right," Dara whispered, "and rowing is too hard for girls, anyway."

"But he needn't have been so cruel in his righteousness," said Jahanara. "You heard! He sounded more like an old king than the diviner of truth he says he wants to be. What did I say? Only one of you can be Emperor."

Prince Khurram was waiting for them on the bank when the barge slowly drew into the landing. He looked as if he might have been standing there for the hour length of their journey, Jahanara thought, by the look of concern on his face. If only he might have come with them. It would have been a gayer ride.

She stumbled when about to step on land because Roshan clung to her so firmly. She forgot the message for Alam because of her concern for the child whose whole day had been full of frustration, starting in the morning before they left the palace because her pet gazelle had to be left at home.

But Alam was there, at her elbow, helping an oars-

man to swing her lightly up the bank onto the grass. She dropped Roshan's hand and pretended to fumble with her veil, bending slightly to the right as if the folds were caught there. She whispered nervously, "Do not refuse anything that is offered you in the next few days," not daring to look at him to be certain he understood.

She thought afterward that she felt an answering pressure for an added second on her elbow, showing he had heard, before she found herself walking on the level ground and obliged to think of Roshan's troubles.

There was one way to help the child which would make Dara happy at the same time, if she could talk to her father before they started home, and without seeming to be urging anything upon him.

Prince Khurram had come down to meet the barge, and he reached for Roshan's other hand, to walk on with them, companionably. He didn't look as if he had spent an afternoon working with a secretary. His beard was smooth, not a fold of his beautiful silk coat was out of place, and the jeweled ornament was as securely fastened in his turban as it had been in the morning.

It was then that Jahanara noticed, too, that part of the camp was still standing, when she had expected everything to be razed and ready for the journey back to Sikandra. Only the cook tents had been struck and the carts which carried them were gone. The *shamiana* and the dressing tents were still in place, but the elephants and their howdahs and the *omrahs'* horses were lined up, nearby, ready to start.

Before she could remark her surprise, Prince Khurram said, "We'll be leaving as soon as all can mount. The musicians were with you so we couldn't send them on ahead. I will post a guard and the carts can come back tomorrow and pack up the rest of the camp. Please now, daughter, help Sati with the children so we can get a good way before dark. Though we have the *omrahs*' protection, I will feel safer, with so many women and children in the party, to be well away from here by sunset. Later there will be moonlight."

"Very well, Father, but I have an idea . . ."

"Nothing important, I hope, at least not now. Tell me tomorrow."

Jahanara urged respectfully, "It has to be now, Father. Roshan was sick this morning, from riding on the elephant. If I could go back in the howdah and hold her on my lap, she might feel easier on the return journey."

At the mention of her indisposition of the morning, Roshan went limp in their clasp and let them drag her along.

Prince Khurram said, "And leave me to ride alone?" His voice was teasing, but Jahanara could tell that he was not pleased. "That black Bija does not take kindly to being led, any more than he does to standing."

Above Roshan's innocent head Jahanara looked at her father and mouthed one word, elaborately, so he would not mistake it — he must not — and then she said, aloud, "That horse is too much indulged. But he need not be led. You can find someone to ride him."

Prince Khurram nodded, then, apparently delighted, and said, "So I can, so I can. How clever of my eldest daughter to think of it. You'd have made a scheming courtier, had you been a boy." He released Roshan's hand then and said, "There, both of you, run along. Tell Sati how you will ride."

Roshan had to move under her own power the rest of the way to the dressing tent to get her veil from Salima and on to the waiting elephants. She promptly went to sleep again when the procession started after some delay, and became a heavier weight in Jahanara's arms with each added furlong of the way.

The elephants plodded, never shifting pace or gait, each never farther away from the next one in line than a space that could be closed by an extended trunk. Jahanara was on the leading beast, and occasionally, between the movements of the huge rump and the nodding head of the mahout in front, she could see her father and Dara, talking as they rode. The little interval at the end of the day was wonderful for Dara, if not for her father, and he seemed to be making Dara feel at ease and welcome. That was good.

Her own head nodded, but she could not sleep as Roshan did, lulled and secure in her arms. They began to ache, and she shifted the child from time to time, but it didn't do any good. If she had some diversion she need not think about the numbness, but there was no one to talk to. Morad had come with her at the last minute, deserting the secretary's elephant, and now he, too, was asleep and lean-

ing against her. There were the *omrahs*, of course, riding guard on either side, but one did not talk to them.

There was no sound, either, to keep Jahanara alert except the rhythmic chiming of the elephants' bells, two on each beast, hung at the end of golden cords around their thick necks. Each chime meant one more step taken, and the tired girl began to count them until that monotony made her head nod once more and she must have dozed off.

When she sat up straight again, rubbing the back of her neck with her free hand to ease the aching muscles there, she saw that the moon had stolen past her and was bringing the countryside back out of the shadowy night. Ah, there ahead among the treetops were the little turrets on the corners of Grandfather Akbar's tomb, and nearer, the shepherds' huts at the far corner of the Sikan-dra estate. They were almost home.

That was when she first heard the strange noise coming, it seemed, from some distance in front. It was an eerie sound — nothing she could place, though there was a quality of human sorrow in it, a heartfelt wail. Others had noticed it, too, because the procession seemed to wake up all along its length and several of the outriders spurred forward to see what it might be.

No one found out until they reached the palace gates. The sound grew stronger as they approached, and then they knew it must be coming from inside their own courtyard. Someone was, indeed, in great sorrow of heart and could not be comforted. What had happened while they were away?

It was a small body to produce such a large sound of grief, only a baby crying for his mother, but he was a baby elephant and the noise therefore was proportionately louder. Khumi stood squarely in the gateway, planted stubbornly on his four shaking little legs, and a keeper was there with a chain round a forefoot to keep him at home.

The keeper looked shaky, too, and he was so weary and anxious and angry that he forgot to bow to his princes when the two horses approached.

"All day," he said, in a trembling voice, "this Khumi refuses his food. All day he cries. All day he has stayed in this spot where I caught him just in time so that he would not follow you. All day I can do no other work. Highness, forgive..."

Prince Khurram gestured, lazily. "'Tis no matter. 'Tis a way babies have, needing their mothers. I, the father of seven, know."

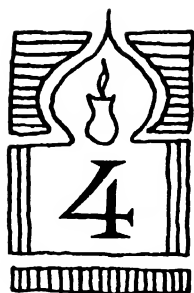
Khumi's mother was second in line. She moved deliberately out of it and her mahout insisted afterward that it was her idea, not his. She crowded past Jahanara's elephant and the horses and her son strained at the chain to get to her. He should have spared his efforts. Instead of a loving reunion, he received a sound spanking, there before the whole company, a harder one than that of the morning. His mourning stopped abruptly after one more astonished shriek and the silence seemed almost as loud as the wailing had been, because it was so deep.

It was a strange ending to a day that had not been as happy for everyone in reality as it had in anticipation. Ro-

shan had not enjoyed it, and it was doubtful if Zebby had, though they might never know. It had been pleasant only in part for Jahanara herself.

She sighed, thinking about it, when she undressed. It had taken some time for all to dismount and to get the sleepy children back to the nursery where she, too, would spend one more night.

Something floated to the floor, something that had apparently got caught in her veil. She looked about, not wanting a moth to flutter about the room and disturb their sleep, and found instead the falcon's feather which had begun her journey that day with what she thought a good omen. Perhaps it had been. It would be something pleasant to think about for a long time. She put the feather carefully away before she crept into bed.



JEWELS FOR A PRINCESS

The new room Jahanara was given was next door to the nursery. She had expected to be farther away from the children. It was a small room, but it had its own balcony and it was large enough for her bed and chests of clothes. The cold marble floor was covered with a good carpet, a family piece she had been allowed to choose for herself from the great vault where the carpets hung on poles slung from the ceiling. She refused to have mats laid under it, as the larger rooms had. When the hot weather came it would be put away again, but for now its thickness would be a comfort for bare feet on chilly mornings.

The best part was that she could close the door and shut out shrill children's voices when she wanted to say her prayers or sit quietly on the balcony, watching the activity down in the huge gravelled courtyard below.

She walked about, that first morning, when the things were in place, and she was indeed alone, pulling a corner of the rug and running her hand over the silk and velvet coverlet on her bed. It was all beautiful, and all hers, and she was fourteen.

The room had been used as a small supply place for this palace, so she had never noticed the walls, hidden for the most part by shelves. Now she stood examining the fine mosaic of bright stones set in each panel of creamy marble. The pattern was a spray of flowers in a vase. She ran her finger over one and found the joinings of the stones as smooth as if they were all one piece. Others had done the same thing, no doubt, many times. The marble felt like satin under her hand, it was so smooth. She fell into a daydream about the many who might have lived in this room before her, because the palace was an old building, and had been in the family a long time.

And then she lifted one shoulder in a resigned shrug because there was young Roshan at the door, calling to her, something she could not hear. She would have to open to the child, and if she knew her little sister, she would stay unless something else came along that was more interesting. Roshan should be starting lessons.

But Roshan didn't ask to come in. She was a breathless messenger, poised ready to run out with the other chil-

dren. "Father says you are to come to him in the library, right now," she said importantly, and hurried away.

Salima appeared with Jahanara's scarf, as if she knew all about the message, and stood ready to escort her to her father.

Prince Khurram's library occupied the ground floor of the right wing of the house. In the rear it looked on a secluded garden reached by a wide flight of shallow steps leading down to it from a tall doorway. The garden was only a grass plot with a few trees, but there were roses in it and a narrow brick walk crisscrossed the green, forming squares, with a small pool and a bubbling fountain in the center. High walls closed it in, so that there was nothing to see above but cascading vines and the blue sky over all. The children did not play there, and it breathed peace.

But for Jahanara that morning, the peace lasted only until she found the reason her father had sent for her.

He bade her sit comfortably on cushions that faced the garden and he sat, too, but didn't lounge. He stroked his beard and looked at her, frowning a little, and then his face cleared and he folded his arms. He seemed already the Emperor sitting there and looking down at her, and Jahanara had a feeling that she was in the Great Hall of Audience at the palace in Agra, but when he spoke it was as her father and her illusion went away.

"Congratulations, my daughter! On your birthday! It seems a long time since you were born — do you feel quite old and ready for court? Have the children's troubles bothered you, eh, eldest daughter?"

Jahanara was ready to laugh and make a polite rejection of her worries with the children, now that they were over. She did dismiss it all with a little movement of her hand. But the prince did not give her a chance to speak.

He said, "Everyone who is born has a responsibility to life, of one kind or another. Sometimes I wish my own destiny might be different." He gestured toward the niches in the walls filled with books, the low tables holding papers and the one where he worked most. "A general in the army has so little time for these."

A miniature chest sat upon his desk and Jahanara knew what was inside — the handfuls of unset stones, emeralds, rubies, a few pearls, more sapphires and glittering diamonds. When Prince Khurram was really troubled he took them out and poured them from one hand to another. They turned and slanted in the light as they fell, so that their sparkle was even greater. And usually, when they were shut away again in the small chest, he had the answer to the thing he needed to decide at the moment. Jahanara had watched him more than once pouring, hesitating, tossing a diamond, catching it, with a blank look on his face, intent, withdrawn, until in one motion the jewels were all swept up and hidden again, and he'd reach for a pen and sign the paper lying in front of him or send for someone and tell him what he had decided about a matter.

"So, now," his voice jerked Jahanara's reverie back to the present minute and her own wonder why she was here, "there's your destiny to consider and to prepare you

for." The way he pronounced the word "destiny" had an ominous sound. And yet . . .

Jahanara's heart leaped once, as if a hand had reached inside her and squeezed hard. Perhaps her father meant to sweep away all obstacles, get that law revoked before he became Emperor, if he ever should — perhaps fulfillment was coming now, talk about a marriage arrangement for her. Would they give her a chance to speak a name, suggest a preference in husbands? How could she when she didn't know anyone except Alam?

But Prince Khurram had nothing so glittering, so exciting in his mind. It seemed that he wanted her to learn to do the family accounts.

Jahanara was barely able to turn her gasp of surprise and almost of shock into a politely suppressed yawn, which her father did not see. Any girl would have been shocked, princess or not. She was expected to spend at least half of each day setting down tidy figures of salaries paid and of jewels purchased and amounts of crops from the estate farms. The receipts from peasant taxes. The . . . the . . . such things were stewards' and secretaries' business, surely. But not from her father's viewpoint, apparently.

Prince Khurram said, "Let us walk in the garden. I have much to explain to you, my daughter. It will be tiresome, sitting here so long."

There was more? Jahanara got up, numbly, and followed her father into the sunshine, where they walked the garden paths and she was given a glimpse of what she

might expect her life to be until she died — unless of course, some time in the dim future, before it was too late, that unjust marriage law was changed. Listening, she wondered if helping in the nursery might not have been more exciting, after all. Except that her mother would have to produce more babies to keep her occupied and they did have seven children now — quite enough for one family.

Jahanara plucked a rose from a bush beside the little door in the garden wall which opened to the great spreading wing in the rear where the women's apartments were. Like the faint brush of a bird's wing across her eyes, the thought came that she was glad she didn't have to live there, in the middle of the constant chatter and gossip.

She paced slowly beside her father, waiting for him to speak. The rose gave her hands something to do, to hide their trembling. It was not respect that kept her silent. Rebellion was rising in her and almost choking her breath. Accounts!

Prince Khurram said, "I wish you could have been born soon enough to know my grandfather, the great Akbar. I do not want to weary you with my much speaking of him. But he was a great man and a great ruler. I was a year younger than you are now when he died, but it is believed that he meant me to be his successor. He himself was only thirteen when he led his generals and fought and took the throne. That is why he never learned to read. He didn't have time for education. But when he died he was an educated man because of his own perseverance in the arts."

Jahanara wondered silently what all that had to do with accounts. Her father must have a reason for telling her in this roundabout fashion why she was to do them. She felt the choked feeling in her throat easing.

"You haven't said it, my daughter, but I sense you do not want this responsibility I am thrusting upon you. But no one should ever resist a chance to learn something new, even if it is not used at once. Nothing in this world is wasted, and I have an immediate need of you in this thing. It is not easy to keep the record of my business."

Then he outlined it for her, and, in spite of her distaste, Jahanara gradually became interested. "My grandfather kept me with him a great deal," said Prince Khurram, "and he gave me presents. This estate here at Sikandra was crown land and he made it over to me, along with five hundred elephants and a hundred camels, when I was married to your mother, though we have never lived here until now. The great Akbar's private wealth in jewels will never be completely known, because he had so many. Most of mine are his gift. I have added to them. Furthermore, your mother brought a private fortune as her dowry. Together we have vast possessions. We each feel an obligation to less fortunate people. It is a good policy. That is why the Princess Mumtaz occupies herself with her daily charities."

Jahanara murmured a softly spoken, "I think I understand, now, a little."

"That is fortunate," said Prince Khurram, drily. "There are also all these people." He waved a hand vague-

ly that might include only the empty garden, but meant the whole of the palace surroundings; the guard, the musicians, the stablemen and keepers, the gardeners, a small army who worked to make the family comfortable.

"All have to be paid," the prince went on. "Someone has to write down how much each person receives, and total it and compute the balance. You are old enough to do that. That is how I need you most, at present. Some day, when you are reading the family Memoir, which Sati-un-nissa will show you, you will find something in it that the great Akbar believed, which covers all I have been trying to tell you. I myself have read it so many times that I think I can quote it to you, now. Someone else had to write his story for him, but he knew what he wanted said. How he knew!"

They stopped by the fountain and Jahanara stooped and floated her wilting rose in the little pool, and then she gave all her attention, with pride, and a little shame at her own short sight, while her father repeated the paragraph that so moved him.

"It is universally agreed that the noblest employments are the reformation of the manners of the people, the advancement of agriculture, the regulation of the offices and the discipline of the army; and these desirable ends are not to be attained without studying to please the people, joined with good management of the finances

*and exact economy in the expenses of the State;
but when these are kept in view, every class of
society enjoys prosperity."*

"Thank you, Father," said Jahanara, softly, when he had finished. "I didn't understand. You mean that we, here, are like a small State, and that each has a part, and that I, as the eldest, must be the first to begin to help."

"I do mean that, exactly, my daughter. How well you have understood! I thought I might make you see. In time, when I am away, as I so often must be, you can do all that I have been doing, at the end of each day, to keep your mother's accounts in order and the people pleased thereby."

And then he dismissed the matter, completely and thoroughly, for a time, by drawing a small flat case from a deep pocket in the skirt of his stiff silk coat.

He said, "I hope you did not think I had forgotten the importance of this day and your first party at court. You will want to look your best there. I will hear of it from Nur Jahan if you do not. I have no fear, however, that even without these you will not make some of those old . . . ah . . . never mind them, the ladies of the court . . . envious."

He laid the case in her hand and she opened it and saw, winking in the bright noonday sun, the two traditional jewelled pieces that a Mogul lady always wore when she had attained the proper age — the lovely crescent-shaped pin for hair or headdress, and the thumb ring, set with a

tiny mirror surrounded by pearls. There were sapphires and diamonds in the golden crescent and they flashed back a thousand lights and captured rainbows.

Jahanara lifted her smiling face for her father's kiss, but there were tears swimming in her eyes, and they spilled over because there were so many. "You think of a hundred things at once, Father, indeed you do. I am the one who forgot. Not once did I think of having these beautiful things for the party today. And I think I may like doing the accounts now, and working for you."

"And your room? Have they moved you yet? I hope you will like that, too."

"Enough," she said. "If Roshan will only . . ."

He interrupted her to say, hurriedly, "I am forgetting one thing. I did try to do what you asked of me, yesterday, to reward that young man Alam in some way, but when I sent for him this morning, he was gone. He can't be found — he is not on the estate, anywhere."

That meant the search had been thorough, Jahanara knew. She looked down at the open case in her hand and closed it with a sharp snap. Her hands were shaking again. Why should her heart jump and her hands betray her because the young man had disappeared? He was only a musician, she told herself, not worth bothering about. If he had gone away because he suspected that her message meant a reward, that was his business, but it seemed very odd indeed. If only he was safe, wherever he might be!

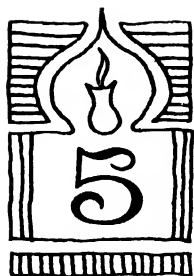
She became aware that her father was looking at her, awaiting her comment. She struggled for poise and said,

coolly, "He must have had a reason. Do not let it trouble you, Father. You have so much else to think about."

"But the boy did save you from a bad accident," Prince Khurram insisted. "That we cannot forget."

"Perhaps he will come back."

"Ah, then I shall have to punish him for inconveniencing me by having to search for him; and the one will cancel the other, and he must remain a musician." Prince Khurram laughed at his own pleasantry and dismissed Jahanara. "It is time you were preparing for the party."



PRESENTATION AT COURT

By some mistake in orders there was no one waiting outside to walk with Jahanara upstairs to her room when she came out of the library.

Instead of hurrying along by herself she lingered behind one of the pillars in the entrance pavilion of the palace, and stood looking out at the desolately empty courtyard.

What if she were to toss the jewel case over the wall into the big formal garden and run out of the big gates and down the road, never stopping until she found Alam? No one would see her.

And if Alam couldn't be persuaded to come back, they'd go on together to the end of time and leave the court and its severe rules and its flashing jewels behind forever.

"You'd be leaving your father too, and how would you know where to search for Alam? And what if he doesn't want to be found?"

Jahanara looked over her shoulder, wondering who was so able to read her mind, who had spoken. But the pavilion was as empty as the courtyard. The sun was overhead and everyone was sensibly at his meal. The voice was her own, from her accusing heart.

She turned and scurried up the stairs, to the safety of her own room and away from temptation. But now that Alam's situation had forced itself into her thoughts, it was natural to wonder where he had gone and why. What was he afraid of? What was a person of his apparent good breeding doing in a musicians' corps, anyway? They were hired people of not very high standing, and with no position at court. Entertainers they were, merely, in a class by themselves. Some of them, indeed, could on occasion help out in circus acts when there was need during the Emperor's entertainments. Alam didn't seem like them. He was well spoken and not cringingly humble. Why had he run away?

Salima found Jahanara sitting on her bed, still thinking, when she came to prepare her mistress for the party. The maid exclaimed and ah'd over the jewels. "A great pity," she said, "if the prince, your father, had not thought of them in time."

Jahanara got up slowly and took the crescent out of the case to fasten it in her hair. It glittered against her dark locks, reflected in the tiny mirror, as much as it had in the sunshine. "He didn't forget, Salima. He wouldn't. I was sure that these were made for me long ago, against this day."

"You should be dressing now, my lady. You must not keep your mother waiting. Come!"

Jahanara stood up and watched Salima throw open one of the chests and take out garments she had never seen before. There was a soft green velvet trouser-skirt, the shade of new leaves, a gold tissue scarf, fine as a cobweb, and a delicate, shimmering, ivory-toned blouse, all of it indeed fitting to be worn by any princess on her presentation to the Emperor's wife, Nur Jahan. She was not the children's grandmother. Prince Khurram's mother had been a Rajput princess from Mewar.

"When were these made?" Jahanara asked, lifting the scarf.

"Weeks ago, my lady. The sempstress here took the measure of your last year's best habit, and we had to hope they would be right. I brought them from their hiding place this morning while you were with your father in the library."

Jahanara touched the soft velvet. "Everything is too beautiful to wear," she insisted. "I'll spoil them going in, during that dusty five miles."

Salima shook her head. "Not today. I heard the orders. Shall I tell?"

"Of course, tell," said Jahanara. "That's half what

you are for, to bring me all the news. You are failing in your duty, I am just reminded — ” she tried to look severe and didn’t — “my grandfather’s illness is known to all but me.”

Salima said, “He walks around. He is old. We all stop living some day. Is it important?” She gestured as if it weren’t, waving it away.

“It is to *this* household,” said Jahanara, “and you know why, Salima. Hear everything for me. First, today’s orders.”

“You and the lady Mumtaz are to go together, in a palanquin swung between two elephants, so that you will be sheltered by the curtains from the wind and the dust, and the whole countryside shall not see before the Empress does, how you are dressed and what jewels you wear. The Prince is not too busy preparing to leave that he does not think of his family.”

“To leave?” Jahanara echoed, “Salima, what do you mean?” She sat down weakly.

“He did not tell you this morning?” Salima looked frightened.

Jahanara shook her head. “Why would he not tell me?”

“He had time enough to say it thrice,” said Salima. “It wants but few words, the thing I heard. Because of trouble in the south, he must go. He only awaits a messenger.”

“He wishes . . . not to spoil my birthday. My father! He was giving me the accounts to do and sparing me, too.”

When sounds outside indicated that there was some activity in the courtyard, Salima went to the balcony.

"The elephants are coming, my lady," she reported. "It is time for you to make ready. Your bath first. You must not tarry."

Jahanara stepped into the rose-scented water and out of it, submitted to being dressed in the new velvet and silk, pinned the crescent to veil and hair, all with a crushed manner as if her mind was only partly there on the mechanics of preparing for a party.

When she was ready, Salima handed her a soft white shawl to wrap around her elegance and said, gently, "You will be with your mother. She will comfort you. She knows. It is her grief, too, remember, these absences of your father's."

So it was. Wise Salima! She earned her wage.

The leather straps of the palanquin, which held it securely to the elephants' harness, squeaked at each step and the bells joined in so that the mahouts and the *omrahs* who rode as escorts had no chance to hear what the two royal ladies said to each other that afternoon.

Jahanara couldn't remember when she and her mother had been alone like this, not for a long time. Too many things separated them. There were the needs of the other six children, Jahanara's own poring over lessons, and isolation with the nursery responsibility. Indeed, her remark to Salima about bringing the news was not all jest. It was her best means of knowing the palace happenings when she had not seen her parents for days on end. The poorest peasants had a family life that Prince Khurram's children never seemed to experience.

Mumtaz Mahall reached for the hand of her eldest and clasped it, holding it warmly. Jahanara looked at her beautiful mother shyly. They were almost strangers, two women who adored the same man. He was their chief, almost their only bond.

"Are you thinking the same thing I am, my daughter?" asked Princess Mumtaz.

Jahanara said, "That I couldn't say, until you tell me, my mother. Is it that we might enjoy this — riding together or talking together — more often? That it should give us pleasure?"

Mumtaz nodded and let Jahanara's hand slide slowly away out of her clasp. She shifted her scarf, the same gold tissue as her daughter's, and her jewelled bracelets tinkled faintly along her arm, under the chime of the elephant bells. "So let us talk," she said. "We have five miles."

But one didn't just begin to chatter about nothing, not with one's mother, when the things that might be discussed were tumbling over each other in a girl's head. It might be a good idea to start with the latest matter, though. Jahanara hesitated before she asked, "You know that I am to help with the accounts? Learn them?"

"Your father and I talked of it yesterday."

"And you think it will be a good thing?"

"It could give us some time together, particularly after your father goes away." Mumtaz arched her smooth brows at her child, questioningly. "You know about that?"

"Father said nothing, this morning."

"Nay, but you must know, Nara. Servants' gossip

reaches the nursery, surely, if you did not learn of it some other way." She made an annoyed gesture. "Not getting to tell you myself is the price I pay for spending the time to look after the needs of all these poor people who come for my bounty, because they cannot seem to keep their own affairs in order. I thought you looked distressed when you joined me just now. What is it that worries you, my daughter?"

"Father goes away from us so much. I learn more from him — different things from those Sati teaches me."

Her mother nodded. "I, too. Do you think I do not miss him — his songs, his wisdom? It is why I have gone with him every time he would allow, to camp — to exile, even." Her face twisted, and her small-boned hands clenched together a moment in her lap, and then she smiled. "But I want him to have what he wants, and that is the throne." She almost whispered the words. "And if he proves successful in this coming campaign and wins a large following . . . that is important, even now, before your grandfather is gone. If only the wise Akbar had established the succession firmly, in the first son, it would all be so simple."

"And had not forbidden marriage to the princesses of our time!" Jahanara exclaimed.

"Ah yes, two here to agree about that, but your father will do something for you and Roshan and Merinza. I will see to it if I can. It is so unjust. How fortunate that I am a Persian on whom such a rule could have had no effect." She raised both hands in an emphatic gesture. "La, la, there

must be someone to marry the Mogul princes, if there are to be any sons to fight about the succession."

They both laughed. But there was more than amusement in it. And it made Jahanara wonder if she herself, if she had had the choice, would choose to be born a Mogul princess with all its drawbacks, rather than not to be born at all. Life had a few good things to offer, and especially when one was fourteen. It was pleasant to be allowed to talk to her mother in this woman-to-woman fashion and not have to wait to be addressed. Already Roshan was brushing that convention aside. Nothing hindered her if she wanted to talk, no matter whom she approached.

Mumtaz said unexpectedly, "You daydream too much, my dear. But it is the manner of girls your age. I did it, too. It is wonderful to dream, though the nice ones do not always come true. You are thinking perhaps that this accounting business is a bad dream? If you do, forgive me, my darling. It was my idea." She hesitated a moment, as if searching for words, and dropped her eyes, and when she looked up Jahanara saw, even by the dim light inside the palanquin, that they were full of glittering tears, though her voice was steady.

"These journeys your father takes," she began, "they have made me think — suppose he doesn't come back? Or suppose something happens to me? I mean you to have my dowry when . . . when I no longer shall need it. Because I am Persian, it will not revert to the Emperor as a Mogul woman's possessions must. We will have a little right-of-succession of our own, the dowry to the first-born

girl, which is you. But you should know the way the interest comes and where it goes and of what it consists, so that no one may cheat you. It is a good knowledge for a woman to have, as my father taught me."

She peered out through the curtains. "We have come. That jolt just now was over the moat into the fortress. I shall feel strange at a party. There have been so few I could attend in recent years, with all our wanderings about. Now I hope we can go on living at Sikandra a while. But of course we must go to the hills later to escape the heat."

"Oh, Mother, must we?"

"Ah yes, child, you do not know what this Agra weather can be like in April and May and June before the rains begin. A raging fire from the sun heats all the bricks and stones and the air is like a live flame. It is hard to breathe. Keeping alive is a dull business."

Mumtaz peeked through the curtain again. "We shall reach the palace in a moment and I have one more thing to say." She reached for Jahanara's hand again and fondled it as she spoke. "After your presentation today, you will be a grown-up member of the court. Now is the time for me to thank you for what you have done for me the past year with the family. With Zebby alone." She shook her head over Zebby. "So many unselfish acts. Your father notices more than he speaks of but he, too, is grateful. Now we must step out and go in to the party. Smile sweetly at Jahangir's lady today, Nara. She does not look upon your father kindly, but I hope she will be gracious. She hasn't seen you for a long time, remember."

The elephants stopped, but the palanquin swung faintly for a moment longer from the rhythmic momentum. Then a hand stilled it and the curtains parted. One of the courtiers was there at the opening to help them down from the short ladder to the ground.

The sunlight was dazzling after the semidarkness behind the drawn curtains of the palanquin, and the rocking gait of their carriers had made both Jahanara and her mother a little dizzy when they stepped out near a cloistered passageway inside the fort.

Nur Jahan had sent two footmen and two court ladies to escort the guests from Sikandra to the Jasmine Tower where the party was assembling. They waited respectfully while Jahanara and her mother clung to each other a moment for steadying, and shook out their full trouser-skirts and adjusted their scarves. In whispers each told the other how beautiful she looked.

Then Mumtaz nodded at the waiting attendants, prepared now to be received. But Jahanara lingered, gesturing across the greensward and flower beds to the shining minarets and tiled roofs of other buildings seen above the trees.

She said, "I had forgotten how beautiful it is. It's years since I was last here. Over there is Grandfather's Hall of Audience and back of us through that pavilion one can see the river, and yonder . . ."

"Shsh!" said Mumtaz.

"But it is, Mother, and all of it so lovely that I'd rather walk around outside and not go to the party at all."

The court ladies laughed and held out their hands,

welcoming and urging at the same time, and the small procession started along the cloister to the lovely room in the Tower.

"If the lady Nur Jahan should hear you say that, I'm afraid . . ."

"Nay, my mother, praise of her home should please her."

The royal hostess was not pleased to have her guests late, particularly the one to be presented that day, and there was a frown Mumtaz did not like on the lady's brow when they approached. It was well known in hushed, factional court circles, that she preferred her husband's other son, Prince Shah Riyar, for the succession, and Mumtaz had reason to be anxious.

The presentation itself was simple. Jahanara was to kneel and lay a hand in each of Nur Jahan's and receive a royal kiss on the brow.

There was no order that a radiant smile should accompany the offering of suppliant hands, but Jahanara added that and her royal grandmother's frown went away. She rose with Jahanara and walked with her about the room, while the other guests bowed where they stood when Nur Jahan murmured their names.

By the time the two came to an open casement set in the fine-carved marble lattice work of the wall that looked on the river, the presentation had been accomplished and Jahanara had become a member of the court circle, the grown-up daughter of a Mogul prince.

The anxieties which had filled her mind while pre-

paring for the ceremony and the ensuing talk with her mother on the journey had taken her thoughts off the terrors of meeting so many people all at once, when she had known so few before. Now that it was over, she felt a great surge of joy rise in her heart and spread upward in a warm wave of pure relief and happiness. If all parties were like this one, they were lovely, particularly when there were so many good things to eat.

She accepted sweet cakes and two *teconas* and a glass of sherbet graciously and caught her mother's eye across the crowded room. Mumtaz gave her a slight nod, meaning all was well, and Jahanara turned again to answer something Nur Jahan was saying.

"The view? Yes, I like it. I should think you'd spend a great deal of time in this spot. Oh, I've just discovered something. Do you see that clump of trees, there, just beyond the curve in the river, in a sort of garden? It has a bright spot of red in it. See it?"

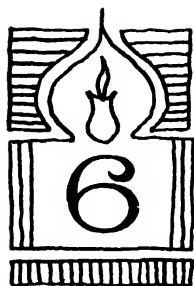
Nur Jahan peered out of the window intently and then announced she did see a spot of red. "You have good eyes, child. That must be three miles, as the crows fly."

Jahanara laughed. "We didn't fly, but all of us were there, yesterday. We had a meal together, outdoors. Only we ourselves. It was wonderful. Father meant to send for the *shamiana* today. I wonder if he forgot."

Nur Jahan looked again. The frown had come back to her forehead and her voice was cold when she said, "He won't forget. Prince Khurram looks after his possessions well. And I shan't soon forgive him for not inviting his fa-

ther and me. He asked for the barge but we were not included."

She turned away swiftly, leaving Jahanara alone at the window. The girl watched her go, with foreboding plain on her face.



REWARD FOR ALAM

When Jahanara reached her room that night — her own place of blessed quietness where she could at last do as she pleased, where she meant to have a few searching thoughts about Alam and Nur Jahan's bad grace — she found an obstacle.

Roshan was there, sitting on the bed with her arm around Merinza's shoulders. The smaller girl's feet stuck straight out resting on air, and she was fast asleep. Roshan still wore her small round boxed cap meant for daytime wear outdoors. There was also a determined look on her chubby face which nothing except getting her own way could change.

Jahanara knew that look. But at the same time, both little girls looked so sweet and appealing that she wanted to gather them into her arms before administering whatever additional comfort Roshan needed. Zebby must have been up to his worst this afternoon, she decided. But Merinza's part in it was a mystery. Zebby paid no attention to her at any time.

Before she could make a move toward the children or say a word, Old Nurse appeared with murmurings and gestures and half-uttered exclamations that would bewilder anybody and explained nothing.

"Oh my lady Jahanara, please . . . I couldn't make her . . . very trying. It is long past their bedtime . . . please excuse. Come now, Roshan Rai."

She was a good old body, fat and usually placid, long accustomed to the demands of Mumtaz' nursery wherever they might be, because she had come with her from Persia. But tonight something had made her almost incoherent.

Jahanara said, "Come, Roshan. You seem to be causing some trouble. Why have you got the baby in here? She should have been in bed long ago, and why aren't you in yours?"

Roshan stuck out her full lower lip as far as it would go. "Merinza is here to protect me," she said, primly. "I haven't a maid, as you have Salima, so I have Merinza."

"But child — here, let Nurse take her, and I'll protect you. Unless you want to tell me now what is the matter, and then you can go along, too. Why didn't you tell Salima? She's here."

"Salima was eating her supper," said Roshan, doggedly. "And I won't say a thing, not before her." She scowled at the poor old woman.

So Merinza was detached as painlessly as possible, but not without raising some angry yells. When finally there was peace, Jahanara sat down by the pouting Roshan. "Now then," she commanded, "talk!"

It was an astonishing thing in itself. That it should have reached Jahanara at all and then by the hand of a child princess was even more surprising. Such things shouldn't happen. Roshan had brought her a smudged, folded note. She said, "A man gave this to Zebby to give you and said nobody should see it but you."

Several people had, though, surely, because it was so crumpled. Jahanara took the note doubtfully and read it, conscious of Roshan's stare. The words were innocent enough but the sender had been either stupid or daring — thoughtless, at best. Jahanara's throat tightened with concern for the children. Out here at Sikandra she and they had been far enough removed from court intrigues not to be touched by them and it was only this afternoon that her own anxiety had been aroused because of Nur Jahan's spiteful remarks about Prince Khurram. Now this.

But she kept her voice steady as she asked Roshan how many people knew about the note.

"Only I, besides Zebby," said the little girl, proudly. "Nurse asked what we were whispering about but we didn't tell. And I didn't read it," she ended, virtuously.

"Because you don't know how," said Jahanara, thank-

ful in half of her mind that the child was still completely illiterate.

"But I'm going to learn," Roshan announced. "Zebby is going to teach me, and then I can read all your notes. Zebby told me what is in this one. He laughed."

Jahanara wondered what Zebby had made of the few sentences. It hadn't seemed amusing to her on her own first reading, and she was still puzzled when she read it again.

She asked Roshan where Zebby got the note. "What kind of person gave it to him? Why didn't Zebby give it to me himself?"

"Because the man said you were to have it at once, on your return from the party, and Zebby is a boy. He couldn't wait here."

Aurangzeb could be the brother Roshan liked best, but now she seemed to feel he belonged to an inferior class. For a second or two, Jahanara's fears receded, while she looked down at the stubborn little figure. She wanted to laugh and still gather her into loving arms. How much of her belligerence covered a need to see her mother often?

But Roshan evaded love and comfort that night. She stood up and yawned and clutched at Jahanara to keep herself upright for a moment. Then she said, with a hand over her mouth to hold back another, wider yawn. "Whatever you're going to give me to keep still, give it to me now. I'm sleepy. I have to go to bed. Didn't you hear Nurse tell me?"

Jahanara had no intention, and indeed there wasn't time if she took care of the note's urgency, to rummage through her chests and display treasures for Roshan's choice. Experience had taught her how futile that would be if one was in a hurry. Roshan never, on principle, took the first thing offered.

"Wait until morning, Roshan Rai. It will be something nice, I promise you." She pushed the child gently to the door. "By morning you'll be wide awake and can make a better choice."

Surprisingly, Roshan agreed. "All right, but don't think I'll forget."

When the door latch clicked, Jahanara flew to a chest and began to change, swiftly, into dark, old garments which would not be noticeable at night. She meant to be her own messenger instead of sending out a reply, as the note requested. It was from Alam.

"My lady, please grant me a favor! I do not wish to be sent away from this post and I hear I am in danger of that. I can explain my absence last night and today if you will intercede and ask Prince Khurram to let me plead my case? I have just returned and find he is very wroth with me. There is no one through whom I may appeal except you. I am not on duty tonight until after the evening meal and will wait in the garden behind the library for your message telling me if you can help me.

Alam, Trumpeter

What was funny in a man's desperation? Jahanara asked it of herself as she flew down the stairs and paused to see that she was not observed before crossing the pavilion in front of the palace entrance to reach the small private gate to the garden without going through the library. Her father could be there.

She had almost reached the gate when a figure stepped out from behind one of the pillars and clutched her sleeve. She almost cried out before she felt a hand at her mouth. Her fear eased when she saw how short the figure was.

"Zebby!" she whispered. "Oh, I am glad to see you."

"You were a fool not to send Salima . . . or me," he said.

"What does it matter, now you are here? Has he come yet? Where is the guard? How did you get by him? Or I?" She hadn't thought of the evening guard until that moment.

Zebby said, "I sent the fellow on a fool's errand. I've done it before, to other guards. They daren't tell Father. We're safe. Go on and see your lover, Nara."

Little boy that he was, he leered at her, in the moonrise, and she slapped him, hard. "'Tis you are the fool," she said. "This man is only a trumpeter who saved me from a bad fall yesterday morning, and well you know it. He needs help and I mean to try to get it for him. I'm sorry for you, Zebby. Now that you are here, watch the gate."

She stamped her foot at him, and whirled and the next moment was slipping through the small door, partly hid by the vines on the garden wall.

Alam was there in a shadowy corner, and speechless for a moment when he saw she was her own messenger. He bowed formally and Jahanara said, "I felt I could best help you if I hear your story. Who are you, Alam? Why did you go away? You must talk swiftly before my maid misses me and starts a search. One lives a prescribed life in a prince's house."

"I know that, too well," said Alam. "What about the guard in front of the pavilion?"

"My brother, Prince Aurangzeb, watches in his place. He took care of that. He is too shrewd a child for his age, I fear. He read your note. Oh Alam, why did you bring the children into this?"

"But that was not my intent, my lady. A garden boy was to give my note to your maid. Something went wrong, surely."

"Yes, that is plain . . . I am so glad . . . no matter, speak quickly now, Alam, while we have time."

"You know the law, my lady, that male children born in the harem at Agra are to be kept prisoner for all their lives, lest they make claim to power and property on account of their royal blood?"

"I've heard of it. Unjust it is, and cruel. There are many injustices at Agra. Do you mean you are one of those children, that you have somehow escaped?"

"I am, my lady, though I was never imprisoned. They smuggled me away at birth, saying the new baby died. My mother wailed convincingly, I am told. I was brought up knowing her but not my father. My descent is good, they

say. I am allowed to visit my mother at times, when all ways are open and clear at the fort, guards warned to look the other way or not even to be around when I appear. On each occasion it is the same. Gold has magic power." He grinned. "I try never to miss a summons, because I cannot go often on account of the necessary arrangements."

"Oh, Alam, so hard for you!"

"Nay, my lady, because I have friends here among the men. They will never give me away, though they do not know where I go, when I am absent. I have only one enemy, the chief *omrah*, who is a hard man. I act above my station, he says, and he tries to humiliate me whenever he can. That is why I could not appeal to him now."

"Even one enemy is bad to have," said Jahanara.

"Ay, my lady, especially when one is as near the court as I. And now on my return they say the Prince is very angry and I must find out the reason. Surely it can't be to reprimand me for daring to speak to you yesterday? I saw him watching us from that upper balcony when I picked up my trumpet."

"Nay, Alam, not reprimand, surely, though now I do not know what it will be. I asked him to transfer you to the *omrah* corps."

"My lady!"

"I felt it fitting. But when my father found this morning that you were not here, he said your punishment for running away would cancel any reward he might have in mind for you. I had no idea he would act so fast."

Alam groaned and turned away. "I thank you for

coming, my lady. The reprimand will be the easier to take, now that I am prepared."

Jahanara could scarcely credit such humility. Did he mean to leave it that way? She put out her hand. "Wait, Alam! This can't be the end of it. I have caused you great trouble by riding that black horse, so I owe you something, no matter what my father says about punishments. Will you give me permission to tell him who you are? Is there too much risk for other people, if I do? Or for you? He might feel he should send you to prison, even now." She clasped her hands, tightly, holding them out in appeal for his decision.

He turned back to her, his face changing in the now bright moonlight. "If only the chief *omrah* need not know!" he exclaimed. "I am not afraid for my mother. She is well enough protected. Nor . . . not, for myself, either. But you . . . if your coming here to the garden should get you into trouble, then let me take my reprimand without explaining. It has been a measure of reward to see you and talk like this. I do thank you, my lady."

Jahanara laughed softly. "You heard what I said when I stepped off the barge yesterday . . . 'Do not refuse anything you may be offered in the next few days' . . . remember that. Now, may Allah protect you!"

She said it a little more fervently than she realized and the sound of it was still in her ears when she slipped through the little door and found Zebby waiting behind a pillar in the pavilion. He looked at her oddly.

"You were not long," he said.

"Long enough to hear an exciting story. I may tell it to you one day."

He muttered, grumpily, something she didn't understand and followed her up the stairs.

Back safely in her room she took the falcon's feather from its hiding place and stepped out onto the balcony with it in her fingers, stroking the fine crisp barbs, separating them and smoothing them together again down to the brown arrow that marked it so perfectly. Falcons went to their mark so swiftly and surely that they practically never missed. If she tried the falcon's form in talking to her father about Alam it might surprise him so thoroughly that he'd do what she asked without knowing the argument was over before it was begun. She had to try. Alam was worthy of an *omrah's* post. He must have it.

She went to bed resolved that if she did not see her father in the morning when out for her usual ride, she would make an opportunity somehow to talk to him. It was a great disappointment to wake next day to the sound of rain. Some indoor strategy must be developed.

There was no use moping about her room, and it might be a good idea to start her new work today or appear to be willing to do it. Why not go down to the library. She had no assurance that her father would be at work there at this early hour, but it seemed the logical place to go for lack of other direction as to where she would spend her daytime henceforth. If he wasn't about, she could always read or perhaps even do a poem about the rain. She had never written one like that.

The room was empty and there was no sign that anyone had yet been in it that morning. The cushions were still plumped and piled neatly and all of the books were put away, from the litter on the tables that she had seen the day before. There was only one large folio on her father's desk.

So Jahanara thankfully turned to the shelves. Because they had lived in this palace so short a time, she was still unfamiliar with the books she found in the stone-shelved niches in the walls. She browsed happily up and down, reading a few pages, thrusting a book back, and going on to something else, as a bee might lazily buzz from one flower to the next in a garden. She was searching for poetry.

Finally, with a faded small folio under her arm, the account of a Chinese traveller to India, on one page of which she had caught the name Agra, and with a book of Persian poetry in her hand, she settled herself comfortably on nearby cushions and began to read, soothed by the quiet of the room.

The name of the Chinese traveller was Fa-Hien and he had penetrated into India north as far as the Jumna River over a thousand years before.

"He was here," Jahanara thought, leafing through the pages hurriedly, to get to the poetry volume in her lap.

The book and the journey were both old. Fa-Hien recounted his experience of the weather, called it a mild climate and said the people were many and happy. There were no onions or garlic in their food. Jahanara wrinkled

up her nose. How could anyone make a good *pilao* without onions? Taxes were moderate. Only those who cultivated the royal lands paid any assessments. Noble families established special houses for dispensing medical help and other charity. It must have been somewhat in the same fashion as her mother conducted her good deeds, Jahanara thought, forsaking Fa-Hien.

When she took up the poetry she was lost to time and sound at the first word, beginning a perfect description of dawn:

*"Wake! for the sun, who scattered into flight
The Stars before him from the field of night
Drives night along with them from Heaven
And strikes the Emperor's turret
With a shaft of light."*

There was more, a great deal more, about roses and gardens and nightingales, but one knew the poet was talking about the episodes of a lifetime. The work was some six centuries old, and she had never seen it before. Why had Sati omitted it from her teaching? Perhaps she had not known about it. But now it was found and it would be something to talk about, between dull moments in accounts.

Jahanara read it through and went back again, beaming happily at the page which was saying many things she had felt, even for her tender years, and knew they were

being said better than anything she herself could ever attempt. She began to read softly aloud:

*"Come, fill the cup
And in the fire of spring
Your winter-garment of repentance fling.
The Bird of Time has but a little way
To flutter, and the Bird is on the wing.
Ah, my beloved, fill the cup
That clears today of past regrets
And future fears . . .
Tomorrow I may be with yesterday's
Seven thousand years."*

She did not hear her father come in, did not know he was there, until he spoke, heard his deeper voice above her soft whispers.

"At least you must have been here on time, because you didn't ride this morning. But you aren't working."

Jahanara jumped up and the book fell on the floor. "There wasn't anyone here to give me a task, sir," she said. "Where shall I begin?"

Prince Khurram leaned to pick up her book, looked at it, and lifted his eyebrows at her, questioningly. She could not even guess today what emotion was there beneath the trim beard. He shook his head.

"It is high time we put you to work, when one of my own sons warns me that I ought to look after my eldest

daughter better. He said, did your zealous brother Zebby, that I'd get an interesting story from you, Jahanara, if I tried." His voice changed, became stern. "I don't have to try. Much as I regret the source of the information — perhaps I need to look after him a little better, too — all I have to say is speak, Daughter, and I do say it. What have you been doing? You haven't had much time for mischief lately, 'tis true, but what have you to say?"

The Prince, it was plain now, was very angry. Jahanara took a deep breath and plunged, with a fleeting thought of gratitude to Zebby, though he had meant mischief and not help, that he had made it so easy for her to approach her father with Alam's story.

"Father, do you believe in justice?"

Prince Khurram was so surprised that he almost gaped at her. He had been prepared for a guilty look and a hanging head, perhaps pleading. He said, "You know that I do. Have I ever treated you unjustly?"

"Oh, sir, it isn't for myself that I am asking justice. It is for that poor young man, the trumpeter. Father, I know who he is . . . well, that he is worthy. His mother lives at the fort, in the women's quarters. He is allowed to see her occasionally and a visit was arranged for night before last. He is back now. Won't you please see him, Father? Do something for him?"

Prince Khurram motioned to her to sit down. He felt a need to do so himself. Young Zebby was indeed getting above himself if this was all he could stir up. The girl was just like her mother. He'd have to curb her tendency to

look out for other people before her own needs. But he knew, as he looked at Jahanara and her clear eyes met his, that he shouldn't start the discipline now. She was asking for justice. It was a strong word.

"How did you find this out? I would scarcely suggest it was through Salima."

Jahanara wondered how much her father really knew. Zebby wouldn't have told enough to implicate himself too deeply, she was sure. There was a smile beginning under the beard, which was encouraging. While she hesitated a moment longer her father rose and began walking up and down the room, apparently thinking out loud.

"I ought to take the boy back to prison. That is the rule for such as I suspect him to be. I wonder how he got out?"

"He was never in," Jahanara answered, quickly. "They said he was dead when he was born and took him away. Father, you must do something for him. He saved me a broken bone . . . well at least, a lot of bruises."

Prince Khurram sighed heavily. "We do owe him something. I'll see your trumpeter . . . I might find out who he is. Don't worry about it any more, Daughter. I intend to see your brother Zebby, some time today, too. He is my worry."

"Thank you, Father. Please don't be too hard on Zebby. I have already dealt with him, a little. It's Alam who needs . . . it is pitiful not to know who your own father is."

The prince gave her a straight look, remarked tersely, "It is sometimes far better not to know," and then he

went to his desk and opened the enormous folio there. "Here is your first piece of work, Nara. I've been collecting these for a long time. Buildings. Plans of every shape and kind. Some of the drawings I picked up around the palace in Agra, and some I made. Put them in order by number and list them. Some day they may be useful."

Jahanara's mind was not completely absorbed by the drawings she sorted that morning. The falcon's feather omen had worked again, she was sure. Alam's future was safe now and he would be put out of reach of the chief *omrah's* meanness, somehow. But even her sharpened awareness did not help her foresee how far indeed Alam's destiny was already shaping.



THE "NINE DAYS" BAZAAR

The rain came down steadily all day. It made pools in the courtyard gravel. It chilled the atmosphere and people's bones so that no one ventured out who had no compelling purpose. It housed the children of Prince Khurram, and there was rioting in the nursery.

But their sister Jahanara, safely shut away in the library and bent over the big folio of drawings, did not hear. Nursery responsibilities were at last behind her. In this quiet place where the lovely Persian wall hangings shut out the sound of the rain, where the light was so dim that candles had to be brought, Jahanara didn't notice the pass-

ing of the seconds and minutes and hours which added up to her first official day of work. She began to absorb the ideas, the substance of things of stone and marble, the lines of capital, column and dome, which were to find expression in reality many times before her life was done.

At midday Salima came with food on a tray for her mistress.

Prince Khurram went away, then, to eat in his own apartments and afterward he paid a visit to the stables and to Khumi, reported to be so much subdued by his public spanking that he was refusing any kind of nourishment.

From the stables the Prince went to his children's nursery, where the little girls — who seemed to have been crying — welcomed him with delight and asked if he had come to sing to them. He was brusque and their faces fell when they discovered it was only Zebby he wanted to see, by himself, and that not for long. The sharp, concise orders he gave on his departure caused more grief in the nursery and increased the gloom of the dreary day there.

If conspicuous punishment, which Zebby hated, didn't help the boy's conduct, then another way must be tried, the Prince reflected on his way downstairs. He had just time to change to a better coat before he went to meet Alam, summoned for interview to one of the small secluded reception rooms near the main door of the palace.

The meeting lasted longer than either of the two had expected it would, and they both emerged from it with solemn faces, the elder thoughtful and the younger shaken by its revelations. Later, at evening, Alam had time to think at length upon the strange way life had of flinging

destiny in one's face. Because of a girl's carelessness it was he and not some other musician who had today been offered a new post. It would take him journeying and away from his mother, but now that he had acquired knowledge as to the person of his father, he was glad. In all his speculation he had not looked as high as the throne.

At that same hour the maid Salima came to brush Jahanara's long, dark hair — a nightly custom. She worked in silence for a while and the girl laid her head back and closed her eyes. She had strained them in the candles' dim light and she could see lines dancing and wavering. She rubbed them, impatiently.

Salima said, "You are not crying, my lady?"

"No, my eyes are tired. Why might I cry?"

"Because of the trouble in the nursery. You have not heard? Poor Old Nurse! Zebby and Dara had a fight because Zebby boasted that he knew of your recent mischief and had told your father. The noise frightened Merinza so she yelled all through it, and Roshan cried because she was afraid Zebby was getting the worst of it."

"And what did you do?"

"I wasn't there, my lady."

"And the outcome?"

"The Prince came when it was over. That was a strange thing. No one had sent for him. He talked to Zebby alone, so we don't know what was said then. Tonight Old Nurse told me that the boy is to stay by himself for a week, with the very plainest food and no company. No one is to speak to him."

"Roshan will get to him if it is possible. That part

won't be so bad for Zebby. But he will not like missing The "Nine Days" Bazaar next week. We'll have to get him off, some way, Salima, if he isn't out before that. He doesn't care for the affair itself, but he likes being seen where the rest of us are."

"You are too forgiving, my lady. The things that child said! They couldn't be true of you. He may be still a little boy, but his mind runs the way a grown-up person's does. The worst of it is that his gossip has got out to the servants' quarters. Something about a musician . . ."

"Yes," said Jahanara, as calmly as she could manage, "they mean the trumpeter. He held the black horse for me, day before yesterday, when I might have been thrown. My father proposes to reward him, properly."

Salima dropped the brush. "Is that the way of it? I am so glad. It is quite different, my lady, from your brother's story. I must tell . . . there are some who do not have it like that. It should be explained. But the reward has already been given. That is known in the stables."

She bent for the brush and when she came upright, added, "That young man, the trumpeter you say, is to be Prince Khurram's personal courier. The chief *omrah* is showing a poor face about it, they say. He wanted that post for himself."

Jahanara said evenly, "It may be that the *omrah* is too old. The trumpeter is quite young, twenty perhaps. He will look well in a courier's uniform."

Salima finished her work and went away and Jahanara was alone once more. She felt tired in her very bones, and

hadn't noticed the weariness at all until the trumpeter's new appointment had been revealed. There was no use shrugging off her thoughts about him, now. Her rash conduct had forced him — his very existence — into her mind for the present, if not for always. When would she see him again, quietly, so they could talk? It was beyond all custom, yet it had happened twice now, so it might again if Alam were to remain in Sikandra. But he would be leaving when her father did, and it might be that she wouldn't see him again until the troop rode out, southward with the Prince.

But surely her father would not go before The "Nine Days" Bazaar was held. It was the gayest happening of the whole spring season. Families attended together. All the nobles' wives had booths built between the columns in the great Hall of Audience and overflowing into the court in front of it. They made beautiful things for sale, which only the Emperor was allowed to buy. There was dancing and feasting and many entertainments were provided. It was not surprising that Zebby felt it important to be seen at the affair, in spite of his not liking people very much. The younger nobles at court would remember him some day. If he did not mean to be Emperor, he had some idea that seemed to him equally good. Moslem teachers had enjoyed a great deal of power in the old days. They might again.

Jahanara crept into bed with a heavy heart that night, sure that she was too tired to sleep. But she had a healthy body and the air was fresh and cool after the day's rain.

The stars were bright. She would ride in the morning and perhaps, with luck, Alam might be abroad on some errand and she would see him.

But the courtyard was empty next morning of all save a little company who were to ride with her. There were more than the usual court-lady's escort with a groom and a led horse in case one of the three others might go lame. Two *omrahs* were going with them this morning, and a second woman companion. Jahanara gave no sign that the added numbers meant anything to her. But she knew, as plainly as if it had been spelled out for her, that her father had no intention that an incident like that of two days past should happen again.

The "Nine Days" Bazaar had begun in the time of Akbar, one of his many schemes to bring the nobles closer together and thus assure greater harmony in court circles.

Perhaps he had had greater need for such measures then, Jahanara reflected, reading in the Memoir about those early customs. Nowadays Rajputs, Parsees, Persians and Moslems seemed contented together, at least outwardly, though it was notable that the Rajputs never camped within the fort when it was their turn to mount guard. Odd of them. One knew such things without remarking on them. Court gossip, if not malicious, was more interesting.

The affair had originally lasted a literal nine days, but now all the business and excitement and fun was crowded into one exhilarating day. All Mogul Emperors were superstitious about the number nine, which had the

same significance for them that seven has had for other people throughout the ages of the world.

The crowd was always enormous, filling all the space between the booths and overflowing to courtyards and pavilions and balconies, listening to music or watching sports. There was a great deal of competition and rivalry among the women who made the embroideries and spangled the fine gauze scarfs, for the Emperor's custom.

There was gossip too, if one had an ear for it and knew how to piece bits together. Such a person had, in the course of the day, a better collection of news than might be brought together again anywhere in court circles in the rest of the twelve-month.

In time, because all the prominent nobility for miles around made it a point to be seen at the fort for The "Nine Days" Bazaar, there grew up other accepted customs. Many a piece of property changed hands and many dowries were satisfactorily planned as well as other schemes, daringly conceived beneath the noise between dawn and dusk.

Roshan Rai took The "Nine Days" seriously that year. When she came to exact her keeping-still reward from Jahanara, she said, "I've decided what I want. You don't need to take out a lot of things for me to choose. It's some silk I want and some embroidery thread to make something to sell to the Emperor. If I don't take a piece for sale, then Grandfather can't buy anything of me and I shan't get anything either. Zebby said I was greedy. If that's greedy, then all the women are. Don't you think so, Nara?"

The little girl paused for breath and sat down on the floor beside one of the chests. She had been talking very fast and her cheeks were flushed. Her eyes sparkled. She was consumed with her idea.

Jahanara considered. "Maybe we are all greedy once a year."

There was no need to charge a six-year-old mind with the heavy thought that, though her brother Aurangzeb was considered a generous giver, the very opposite of greedy, his family knew that each gift he bestowed was calculated to bring him the best possible return.

Jahanara threw back the lid of the chest and stood looking down somewhat anxiously at the determined child. "Are you sure you want to make something? You've never sewed. You will prick your fingers and the blood will run down and it will sting you and stain the material ..."

Roshan got up and began turning over the things in the chest. "I told you, Nara, I want to. I've got to make something. Zebby said I couldn't. I'll show him."

"What about the lessons you were to be starting? So you can read?"

Roshan hung her head. "Zebby can't, just now. Father punished him. He said a prince didn't tell about things that sisters do or read their notes. Nara, I'm scared. Will Father punish me, too?"

He would, if he found she had been talking to Zebby since his punishment began. How else would Roshan know what their father had said to him? There was no use to

point that out now. So she tried to explain to the bewildered child, in the best fashion she knew, what it meant to help wrongdoers, without actually doing the wrong oneself.

"But I didn't know it was wrong," said Roshan, stubbornly.

"No, but you do now. This time I'm not sure which part of it was wrong and which was right. Because I got that note you brought, I helped Father not to make a bad mistake, so some good came of it. But the next time, if there ever is one, you'd better let Zebby do his own errands. Now then, let's get to the sewing."

The drawings and the accounts would have to wait, she thought, becoming a truant herself after one day at her new occupation. For one more time she was being drawn into the vortex of the nursery day and its needs.

"You'd think I was your mother," she said, gaily, while she unrolled some scraps of heavy silk and drew out some bright threads from another place, for the embroidery.

"I asked her first," said Roshan, candidly. "She said to ask you. She had to give a woman some money because her husband died and the children were hungry. Nara, would all of us be hungry if Father died? Would we, Nara? Merinza would cry."

"And you wouldn't? Don't think of such things, dear. Those people have always been poor, no doubt, so we have to help them. But Grandfather wouldn't let us go hungry — not ever." There was no need to say she meant their mother's father, lovable Asaf Khan.

This was like all the other times in the past year, Jahanara reflected, when Roshan's endless questions had taxed all her knowledge. Who would answer Merinza's? Someone else should look after the charities and let Mumtaz Mahall mother her children. "I need her, too," the girl thought, bitterly.

The little flat oblong case which Roshan began that morning cost the child hours of playtime, but she kept at it, bringing it to Jahanara frequently to show how much she had finished. She carried it with her proudly when the day came and it was put in the first booth for sale.

Jahanara made sure that their mother knew where it was and when Jahangir, the Emperor-Grandfather, paused in that spot Mumtaz contrived to be standing nearby and so was given the case. The old man had an idea she fancied it from something she said. The rose-red silk made it stand out against everything else in the booth. Though the seams were neatly done, the embroidery stitches were crooked, and Roshan had not bothered to finish every line of the design with the same shade of thread, so the whole effect was a little astonishing.

The Emperor bowed over Mumtaz' hand. "It looks a trifle, ma'am, but I'm sure 'tis large enough for carrying a handful of cardamom seeds."

The boys spent the afternoon in the pavilion over the river, watching the elephant fights in the wide cleared space on the bank directly beneath the Durshan window where, on weekdays, the Emperor sat and dispensed justice to all who asked.

The day was bright, the weather beginning to be

warm outdoors even in the morning, and everyone was dressed in his best clothes, thin silk, stiff silk, gauze, embroidery, jewels, golden shoes, high turbans, and flattering smiles worn as exactly as any garment.

Jahanara, with Salima trailing her, stopped at booths to look at the wares, collected a little pile of gifts from the Emperor, and lingered to watch the dancing and juggling. She hoped her progress through the crowd would look like a purposeless meander.

But she had a definite object — to find out if Alam were on duty, or perhaps merely a spectator, if indeed he was present. It would be a pleasure, even if they couldn't talk, just to see him again. But he couldn't have come, she decided, when she had thoroughly quartered the whole festival and had not seen the least sign of a smartly uniformed boy in Prince Khurram's livery, on duty or at leisure.

As she looked out over the gathering she wondered which of the many smiling, beautifully dressed women might be Alam's mother. There was a mystery about her — not many at court had the exceptional influence which the son had implied. If her apparent power lay only in wealth which she could use for lavish bribes in order to see Alam occasionally, why, then, must he earn his living as a musician? More mystery. Jahanara shrugged.

Her search was not a complete loss. A year ago she would not have paid any attention to some of the bits of conversation heard during her slow advance from stall to stall, from river pavilion to the Jasmine Tower.

Someone said that the Emperor would depart shortly

for Kashmir. A great company of nobles and ladies were to accompany him with the Empress, Nur Jahan, who felt that the climate of the hills would help him recover his health. There had been uplifted, questioning eyebrows, and a few doubting comments, which expressed no sympathy.

Jahanara was sure, later on, that a little group had been discussing her father's chance of gaining the throne, and someone had turned in time and seen her, and that changed their gossip to effusive greetings and nothing more was said until she moved away.

Her heart was pounding as she stood pretending interest in a wrestling match nearby. She had caught the words *Sikandra* and *Khurram* and one whole phrase — "the Deccan is rather far when the Emperor's health is so poor" — and then someone laughed.

It was a relief when Salima said, "My lady, we should return to the Tower now, to meet the others. The shadows grow long. It is time to go home."

Jahanara's head ached, and she was disappointed, and now that she had seen beneath the fixed smiles which people wore deliberately, almost as a part of their dress, she was sick at heart. Whom could one trust? She had only her parents — and her father was going away.

She did not listen further to what others said, because her thought was bent to her own troubles, so she was startled when she felt her scarf tugged. It had caught on someone's ornament and those close enough tried to help loosen the delicate threads without breaking any. It was

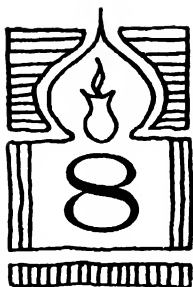
a tedious delay, but before it was over she felt something being thrust into her hand. Paper. Another note? She palmed it instinctively and was able to reach up naturally to readjust her scarf tidily, when it was released.

The five miles to Sikandra on the plodding elephant seemed like a hundred to Jahanara. Dara rode with her and her mother, and Salima had Merinza on her lap.

So it was not until the tired girl could reach her own room, could close the door and stand against it to guard against a surprise visit from one of the children, that she could unfold the tiny twist of paper.

It was from Alam, as she had hoped. He was grateful, he said, for what she had done for him. Grateful and somewhat overwhelmed. "I shall be superstitious about black horses the rest of my life, I think, because Bija brought me a boon I never expected in this life. May Allah protect you!"

Boon? Now what did he mean by that?



MIDNIGHT RIDER

There was a hushed air, as of listening, of waiting, throughout the passages and courtyards of the Sikandra palace in the week following The Nine Days. No one could mistake it, and it grew stronger, every hour.

But it did not stop activity. People sent on errands moved more alertly. The least unusual happening was dutifully reported, to spread to the kitchens and the nursery, to the watchmen at gates and to anyone else who cared to join the knots of gossipers.

Jahanara moved through it, outwardly serene, knowing what it portended — her father's departure with his

troop for the Deccan upon the arrival of the expected messenger. After the first shock of realizing that another separation was upon them, she had gone about her duties with resolution. Sorting the collection of drawings had absorbed more time than Prince Khurram expected and during the task she had had many interruptions. Roshan's sewing was only the beginning, and Jahanara began to realize that, after all her anticipation, there would be no sharp breaking off where her nursery responsibility was concerned. Perhaps her parents had realized that and so had wisely chosen her new room for its nearness to the other children.

The morning after The Nine Days Jahanara returned to the library feeling sure that she could finish the work on the drawings. She approached the end reluctantly, and at noon she closed the big folio, her task completed. There would now be no more delay on beginning the accounts. She could have the afternoon free and tomorrow, dread ultimatum, she must meet Sati-un-nissa as soon as she came in from her ride, for her first instructions about the record-keeping.

She would need all her resolution, she found, when the moment came. It turned out that she wouldn't be working near her mother and that the accounts were done in a small bare room opening on the women's courtyard in the great wing of the palace at the back. Somehow she had thought to be assigned to the lovely peace of the library.

"The women will not bother you," said Sati, encouragingly, when Jahanara lifted her eyebrows, questioning-

ly. That assurance did not help. There was a great deal to learn, much more than she had grasped from what her father had said. But now, understanding the extent of the clerical work needed in the affairs of the estate only enhanced her prospect of boredom.

"Have patience, Nara," Sati said. "Do not let the details discourage you. Many before you have been disheartened and downcast until they mastered those mysteries. Then, at the moment when all was most confused, their minds cleared, as if a veil had been withdrawn. So it will be with you. Now here is the pearl book."

"A whole folio just for pearls?" Jahanara asked incredulously.

"Indeed, It is necessary. Each one in the necklace you wore for the family garden party is entered here. The emeralds in it are in another book."

Sati began explaining the method of entries. "Your father got this idea from the way the great Akbar kept his record. He had all his pearls strung, and the strings made into bundles and they had to be handled every day to keep them from going 'sick,' as they say of a pearl."

Jahanara folded her hands beneath her scarf ends and nodded dutifully as Sati turned pages. There was nothing to inspire a poet's couplets in the carefully written columns which showed where a single pearl or a string had been acquired, their size and shape and price.

But if this was the means by which she was intended to earn the right to marry, she meant to rate the privilege. If this was to be a place of trial to show she could be trust-

ed, then she would be worthy. Her chin lifted. How much of a relief it would have been, though, to cry out against a harsh fate dooming the eldest daughter of Prince Khurram to this long, hateful tedium.

She was glad, later, that she had not displayed her inner feeling. That was when Sati closed the last book — the servants' wages — and said, "Come along now to your father's library. He is not there, but he desired me to show you something which ought to make up for these monotonous accounts. You think I do not know how dull they are?"

The atmosphere of the library was refreshing after the plainness of the smaller room. Prince Khurram had evidently left in a hurry. A little pile of polished stones lay on his desk, winking at Jahanara from a hundred facets in rainbow tints. Fascinated she lingered by the desk, but Sati went to the shelves and turned over a pile of folios. The older ones were written on sheepskin and parchment, and some of later date were on heavy paper.

Jahanara's eyes strayed from the jewels to the shelf where the lovely Persian volume stood and she started toward it, but Sati called her. She had spread one of the enormous books on another low table.

"These are, together, your family's Memoir, Nara, written by the hand of each Emperor or a clerk. Your father desires that you know them intimately — you are old enough now — that you may profit by the things they will reveal to you. We will hope," Sati lowered her voice and lifted a cautioning finger to her lip, "that Prince Khur-

ram will one day add a volume to these." She nodded like a happy conspirator. Her eyes twinkled and she gestured toward the folio. "Here you will find the sweet cakes and the sherbet after the dull morning fare of rice and vegetables among the jewel, the rental, the crop and the salary books."

Jahanara laughed softly. Her heart was lifted, along with her chin. She said, "May Allah forgive me, I shall like the cakes and sherbet best."

"Even as I," said Sati. "Now I must go, but you may stay here. A tray will come, with your midday meal. No more accounts until tomorrow."

It was the *Ain-i-Akbari* which Sati had spread out so enticingly on the low table. Was it her design, or Prince Khurram's, that the new student of family lore should begin with the court record of the great Akbar?

Jahanara sat down with a sigh of anticipation. Nothing had been said about where she was to begin, nor what she was to read, nor if her father intended to examine her later on what she had read. With her heart beating a little faster for what she might discover, she turned the pages, hunting for that unhappy marriage law. It seemed obscure. What if he had never had it recorded and it was only a verbal prohibition? If that was true, how could the succeeding generations be held to it?

Then her eye lighted on a section marked *The Mint* and she forgot her obsession with the law, because anything about money was now her business, too. She began to read:

The inhabitants of the towns and the country perform their transactions by means of money. Every man uses it according to the extent of his necessities; the wants of all are satisfied by it. It is absolutely necessary for the continuance of the human race, as men obtain by money their food and clothing. Again, man requires a dwelling for keeping his provisions. This he calls his home, whether it be tent or cave. Man's existence and the continuation of his life, depend on five things — a father, a mother, children, servants, food, the last of which is required by all.

There was nothing in the passage to show that the author was ruler of a vast empire. Nearly everything he said would fit the humblest family. Bread and money were all that anyone needed to live, he was saying. But he had left out one thing. Love. A family needed that, too. If one substituted love for servants in the list of five necessities, then this wisdom of Akbar's would be more nearly perfect, because farmer families didn't have servants. They waited on each other.

Jahanara tucked one foot under her, read the passage again, and dreamed another daydream, seeing her own family stripped of everything except bread and money and love — barely enough money, but each having something to do to help the others, and all working together to make life pleasant. They would not need jewel books.

The mornings went faster when the actual work in

the dull little record room began, because there was that feast of sherbet and cakes or feeding her mind, whatever one called it, waiting for Jahanara in the family Memoir in the library. References in one old tome led her back to see what the person mentioned had said on the same subject and so she came in time to Babar, founder of the family dynasty, adventurer and gardener, who had built this house and made its formal garden long before Prince Khurram was born.

There was not to be an examination. Her father found her scribbling notes one afternoon and made her blush when he asked what she meant to do with them.

"I haven't intended this to be another kind of school-room, my daughter," he protested. "I had an idea it would be good for you to know something about the ancient warriors whose blood you share. I sometimes wonder what old Timur would make of this capital city. They say Samarkhand was a wonderful place of gardens and fruit and beautiful palaces."

"Not more beautiful than ours," said Jahanara, staunchly. She was glad she hadn't had to confess that she might make a verse or two about Akbar's red-sailed boats carrying his elephants down river to a fort in the south for a demonstration of Mogul might.

It was only after the Prince was gone to the Deccan that Jahanara fully realized how much the family Memoir had helped her through the anxious waiting, when each hour was hastening the event, hastening the lonely time, the emptiness of the rooms, the awful quiet where formerly there had been a deep voice, singing.

But she was to have one more poignant, memorable talk with her father before the emptiness came and the quiet descended. He was plainly dressed, that day — even shabbily — and his boots were dusty. He carried his riding crop and there was a wide, damp band of sweat stain at the edge of his turban. He appeared in the library late in the afternoon at the end of the week, when Jahanara was just closing the *Ain-i-Akbari* for another day.

When she would have run to him for an embrace he held her away, saying, "I've just come from the stables. It is not easy to prepare a troop for the field. But we shall be ready when the time comes. How does the reading go, my daughter?"

He sat down at his desk and the stream of jewels began pouring from one hand to the other, back and forth, catching the low afternoon sun, falling and flying through the air. Jahanara forgot to answer his question because she was wondering what he was now obliged to decide. Or perhaps he was merely relieving his own feeling of anxiety on account of the messenger's delay.

Then he said, abruptly, "I may never see you again in this life, Jahanara. I dislike to remind you or myself that battles bring sorrow to families, and girls particularly shouldn't be burdened with such fears, but you are my . . . the eldest of these seven and I must say it. The Deccan has to be secured and if I am ever to sit in Agra I must make a beginning, though my father still lives. There is my brother, your uncle Prince Shah Riyar, in my way."

Jahanara wanted to cry out, to assure him, to say she understood, but the words wouldn't come. The air in the

room became close and she realized that her father had been in the stables, as he said. She had never seen him like this, work-stained and unkempt.

"So," he went on, "as you are the eldest, and will now know the reckonings of the estate, I depend on you for whatever help you may give your mother while I am away, or if I should never return. When the court rises in a few weeks, to go to the hills, you will join them, with all the children, your mother and Sati-un-nissa. I have given the steward his instructions — how to maintain a watch during our absence. Most of the valuable things will go into the underground vaults. Take with you whatever you fancy. There will be enough load-camels. I want you to be comfortable."

The chest lid flew back then and the jewels poured in a last cascade onto the velvet lining. Prince Khurram rose and Jahanara did, too, and he leaned to kiss her lightly on the brow. "I love you, my daughter. May Allah protect you!"

And then he was away, out of the door, before Jahanara could speak, and something bright which was not a diamond glittered briefly in his beard, one of her tears.

When he went, she thought, Alam would go, too, and she had not seen him again. Though she kept constant watch from her balcony, when not at accounts or here in the library, the new courier had never crossed the courtyard while she was looking. How splendid he must look in his new uniform! She would like to see his bearing.

The last moments, when they came, were as full in their way, of light and sound, as the flashing jewels in

the little chest on Prince Khurram's desk in the library.

Jahanara, restless and sleeping lightly one night, heard a shout somewhere outside and excited voices. She grasped a robe as she leaped from her bed to the balcony. The great entrance gates were opening, and when the breach was wide enough, a dromedary sped in, bearing an exhausted courier who stumbled when he dismounted at the palace steps and demanded to see the Prince. He did not try to keep his voice low.

The courtyard began filling with men, their feet crunching the gravel. Torches flared, set into sockets in the walls and gates, until the place was as bright as daytime. Jahanara kept in the shadow of the roof, so that she might see all and not be seen. She was reminded of the children when she felt hands clutch her; and looking toward the door, she saw Roshan, and behind her Zebby and Dara and Sujah.

"What is it, Nara?" Zebby asked. "Is Father going now?"

She controlled her shaking mouth to answer. Even now, at midnight, she must behave as if in public. She couldn't allow her own feelings to show. Oh Alam, I must see you, her heart cried. May Allah forgive me, I must not be denied that.

Aloud, she said "Shsh!" out of pure habit, because it wasn't necessary for the children to be quiet, with so much tramping and shouting going on below. "I think so. A messenger came on an express camel. See it, the white one! Ah, there is the troop. Yes, they will go, now."

They were pouring out of the entrance to the stable

yard, horses and men, elephants and camels, mahouts, *om-rah*s, and Prince Khurram's big black horse in their midst. The time had come. The troop was leaving for the Decan, all its members thrusting forward eagerly.

Roshan began to weep and Zebby scowled at her and commanded silence. "I only wish I could go," he exulted. "Some day I shall have a big horse and ride as Father does. Look, there he is!"

Prince Khurram was standing on the top step at the palace entrance. Beside him, in a rich, dark green quilted coat and scarlet trousers, was a young trooper. He wore a stiff cockade in his bright turban. It was not jewelled, but something flashed from his right hand before it was covered by the stout glove he was drawing on. That would be the courier's huge ring, seal of identity and authority in one. Alam!

The heads of each corps filed past the Prince, knelt and received papers — their orders, probably — and Alam stood below. Jahanara gasped when she saw it was Bija's rein he held.

Not all his work would be on camel-back. He would have her place tonight, riding beside the Prince down the road to Agra on the first lap of the way. They would not stop in Agra, but everyone there would know by morning what had happened this night.

The courtyard was emptying. Each corps, as its leader was dismissed, moved out into the road to form there and wait in its place in the cavalcade. At last only the load-camels and the carts were left. They carried tents and pa-

vilions and cooking things, chests of clothes — gifts for conquered princes. Jahanara was learning. The Memoir had helped her to understand a great deal in a short time.

Now the leader, too, must depart. He mounted his horse and Alam sprang into Bija's saddle. Bija had stood quietly for him. It was an odd thing to notice, Jahanara thought, when her heart was thumping so anxiously and dolefully. Bija too must have been learning a few things since the day of the family outing.

It was something for Jahanara to think about in the long time until their next meeting, that both Prince Khurram and Alam turned toward that balcony, of all those around the lighted courtyard, to lift their arms in salute and farewell as they started toward the gate. How did they know that anyone was there, watching?

The children refused to be held back any longer and rushed to the railing, lifting their young, thin arms and shouting. Jahanara stepped boldly forward and waved a corner of her robe.

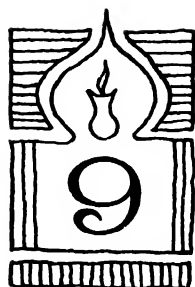
Directly within the gate the horses were reined in for a moment, and Prince Khurram stood in his stirrups, cupping one hand around his mouth to shout, "May Allah protect thee!" And then both men rode on, not looking back, and slowly the great gates began closing.

"They're gone," said Dara, with grieved finality. "He talked to me the other day, Nara. I shall never forget what he said. I . . . I wish we were plain people, with our father at home. Why couldn't somebody else fight the war in the Deccan?"

"Because he means to be Emperor some day, that's why," said Zebby, sharply, and with no grief. "We don't need him here, if he's gone to get a bigger palace for us. Sometimes I think I am cleverer than you, Dara."

Jahanara held back the chastisement she would like to have offered. Instead, she marshalled them back into the house, saying that any clever boy would do well to go to bed and get some sleep.

Roshan hung back, clinging to her, when the boys left. "I want to stay with you, tonight, Nara," the little girl begged. "Please let me. If I go to my own bed, I'll cry." It was an old threat, but Jahanara gave in. Roshan need not know that her presence would be a comfort to her wakeful elder sister.



UP THE HILL AND DOWN AGAIN

The formal garden at the Sikandra palace was in plain sight from the main gates, at the right of the courtyard as one faced the entrance of the house. It had its own gates too, open-latticed so that no one could miss the beauty within, yet stray animal pets or a restive horse could not get through, to trample the grass plots. At the end nearer the road there was a cascade of falling water, behind which, at night, tinted glass lights made rainbows in the stream and changed the flowers to brighter hues than they showed in the daytime.

Fruit trees were pleached against the high red sandstone walls of the garden, and roses grew on trellises. On

the ground, along the little channels of running water which divided the large plot into squares, beds of phlox were duplicated in the moving mirrors. The small streams were fed by the waterfall, which made the garden a cool haven on a hot day.

Since the Emperor Babar's planting so long ago, the garden had never been changed except to renew rose roots and fruit trees when they died out. It was recorded in the family Memoir that he had made it because he was so homesick for a place like it in a distant land, a city called Samarkhand in the Ferghana Valley.

Jahanara was glad for that homesickness, even though it made her feel a bit guilty to rejoice in it, because the garden was a special spot of hers. It had been, ever since Prince Khurram had brought the family to live in Sikandra palace. Of all their homes that she could remember, this one was best.

On the morning following her father's departure for the Deccan, she fled to a stone bench in the garden behind a rose trellis. The roses and their leaves hid her from the courtyard. Without the healing peace of the place she would never be able to face the accounts. She leaned her head against the back of the bench and closed her eyes. There were heavenly smells all about and overhead there was promise of bright weather. The troop would have a good marching day.

The troop! If she could only get it out of her mind! It had taken a long time last night for the sounds of the rumbling carts to die away down the Agra road, and Ro-

shan was sound asleep long before that. Then the country silence was so deep that she herself could not rest. It was almost impossible to lie still and everything would be worse if her tossing woke Roshan up, when the tears might come without any effort and wake others.

At that point she stole out of bed, lit a candle and worked a long time with the scribblings she had made from the Memoir. They wouldn't come right, somehow, though she liked her idea. Perhaps her mood was too troubled. The Memoir had given her a vivid picture of Akbar's elephants standing up in boats and being floated down the Jumna and thence into the Ganges River on their way south.

Now, in the garden, she sat staring at the scratched-in-and-out lines in her notes; and then, here and there, a word stood out and she took a fresh page. A good start, with a swing to it, began to evolve.

*Th' Emperor's elephants
Go riding, go riding
Under crimson sails.*

*Th' Emperor's elephants
Stand meekly, stand meekly
But ring their golden bells.*

*Th' Emperor's elephants
Step softly, step softly
And shake their saucy tails.*

What else would elephants do on a floating boat trip? Even if the sails were a gorgeous red against green river water, or gray skies, or there was a flowering field along the banks, they couldn't stand and blink the whole trip. They ate their food and . . . and what? She threw the paper aside, in annoyance.

The idea about the famous white horses of her thrice great-grandfather Babar's Ferghana Valley hadn't gone much better. He hadn't returned there to die, but she had imagined how it might be if he had, because he seemed to have a genuine affection, even after he was old, for that far-off home of his youth.

*O white horse of Ferghana
Carry me proudly
Carry me, sighing
To my lonely tent.
Whisper it gently,
White horse of Ferghana
Tell them 'tis Babar
Returning, sore spent.
Carry me gently,
White horse of Ferghana*

What more could a lonely man have said on such an imaginary journey? The only thing true about it was the strain of white horses in Ferghana. Why hadn't his sons and grandsons seen to it that the breed was perpetuated? It

would be almost as striking to ride on a pure white horse as on a black one like Bija.

The thought of that fine-boned black Arabian made her drop her papers again. She'd never have another chance to ride him, now. He'd be killed in the wars if his rider wasn't. Or they'd be away so long that he'd have to be shot for age and battle scars, and that would be almost as bad.

Jahanara bent to pick up her papers. She might as well go to work. Her thoughts were giving her no rest in the garden. In the act, she thought she heard her name called and straightened to listen. Ah, yes, her faithful shadow, Roshan. Now what was wanted?

Roshan and Sujah stood at the gates looking in, hesitantly, when Jahanara appeared around the trellis.

"Oh, Nara," said Roshan. "Please come!"

She looked tousled and unkempt, Jahanara thought, and so did Sujah. "Why are you two out, looking like this, your hair not combed and — "

Sujah said, "Old Nurse is sick and we can't find Salima and we haven't had breakfast. Zebby and Dara had another fight about what Zebby said last night on the balcony, about being more clever than Dara. Old Nurse fell down in a faint and it made her nose bleed and . . . what shall we do, Nara?"

Jahanara came through the gates and seized a hand of each child, rushing them along with her to the stairs. She had only one swift stab of conscience about the accounts

she was sure to neglect today. "I can think of a lot of things to do," she told the children.

But when they reached the nursery it was difficult to know which one of the many to do first. It was a strange scene. Dara and Zebby sat in opposite corners, the one looking smug for once, instead of meek, and the other nursing a rapidly blacking eye.

Morad was still in his bed, peacefully sleeping. Old Nurse was trying to stop her nosebleed and Merinza clung to her, weeping. Tears never reddened the little girl's eyes, they merely poured out like excess moisture. She was a beautiful child, with or without tears.

Jahanara dropped the other children's hands, knelt and coaxed Merinza to the corner into Dara's care, giving crisp orders. "Water, Zebby, in a basin — and be quick about it. Sujah, go and look again for Salima."

Dara said, "Salima has gone to see about breakfast." He took Merinza on his lap and spoke defensively to Jahanara. "It was just a little fight. Old Nurse would have had a nosebleed anyway. She said so."

The old woman tried to speak and agree with him, but Jahanara, dabbing away in the water Zebby brought, told her to be quiet and that they'd attend to everything. She leaned over to put another pad against Old Nurse's nostrils and all the papers fell out of her pocket onto the floor.

Zebby bent to pick them up and stopped to read, without asking permission. His eyes sparkled. "The Emperor's elephants," he began, emphasizing the double lines like a pendulum swinging. "This would make a good

game, Nara. Did you write it? Here, Dara, listen to this." He read out the three verses, and the rest of the children took up the rhythm, repeating, "go riding, go riding" and the other refrains, over and over.

"We could take turns," said Dara. "Each player would think of something different for the elephants to do. It would be fun. Do you mind, Nara?"

She shook her head. "Not if it will keep you quiet," she said.

Quiet! It was a long morning, and before it was over Jahanara was sorry she had ever been told about the Memoir, that she had ever discovered about those red sails on the Emperor's barges which floated down the Jumna so picturesquely. But by that time the children looked neat and the nursery was in order and Old Nurse had been sent to the women's quarters to see the doctor.

Salima said, "She is getting too old to handle these children, my lady. She has been ailing for a long time, but she wouldn't let me tell for fear she would be sent away."

"Sent away!" Jahanara exclaimed. "As a penalty for her old age? When she came from Persia with my mother? What a thing to think! My father will see to her."

Salima shook her head. "But he is away and he and the steward decide those things, and when the court rises we shall be leaving here. It is very bad that it wasn't looked into before Prince Khurram left."

It was, indeed. Jahanara, at Salima's request, had been helping to sort the children's clothing to decide what

to pack away and what to take to the hills. The court's movements were uncertain. It was wise to be prepared. She sat back on her heels and considered.

Definitely, they must have a younger woman in charge of the nursery — one who could handle the boys until Prince Khurram let them have rooms of their own. Dara was old enough for that now. There wouldn't be so many fights if he could be by himself and have a little respect as an older brother.

Slowly an idea came. Jahanara nodded to herself. If these things had not been done because no one thought of them, then no one could have much to say if they were done. "No one" meaning her father, of course. She turned to her maid with decision.

"After I have my tray, Salima, I will speak to the steward and to Sati-un-nissa in the library. Please arrange it."

That was the moment when Jahanara felt her childhood slipping away, as if a shadow of the little girl she had been went out of the door, as if an actor were disappearing into the wings when the play was over. It was a strong feeling and she noted it solemnly, sitting on the floor beside an open chest, after Salima had gone on the errand.

The feeling hadn't come to her when she learned that grownups had troublesome duties such as keeping accounts, nor even later when she laid her hands on Nur Jahan's at the presentation ceremony and felt the odd

scrape of their two thumb mirrors as they touched each other. Now the feeling was real. Now she had grown up. Her father was away and her mother must not be bothered with palace matters when she already had her hands full of other people's troubles. Why couldn't they have a little more determination and settle their own difficulties?

The steward was deferent and pleased to be consulted and there was no sign that he thought Jahanara anything but what she was setting out to be — a grown-up princess with a sense of domestic responsibility.

A pension was arranged for Old Nurse. There was a column for such payments in the account book. Sati suggested the person to be the successor, one who definitely could be called Young Nurse. She was summoned and given her instructions.

An orderly was sent for and a plan of the palace rooms was spread out on Prince Khurram's desk. There was one suite, above the quarters where the musicians lived, on the opposite side of the courtyard, which would be excellent for Prince Dara. It could be prepared for him without delay. He was old enough.

Jahanara said, "He may not live in it over a month, and it might be even less than two weeks. It is as the court moves or not. But let him have it. Young Prince Aurangzeb needs taking in hand. This may make him think."

The steward bowed and said, "It shall be done, my lady," and went away.

Sati-un-nissa, who had sat by and watched silently, ex-

cept when appealed to, to speak, beamed at her pupil. "Everything just as I myself would have done it," she said. "Your father will thank you."

"He should thank Old Nurse's nosebleed," said Jahanara. "She might have gone on fooling us a bit longer. But she does need to rest. Those boys!"

Sati laughed. "They are human beings before they are princes," she said, wisely.

Jahanara smiled ruefully. "If they will only behave now, so that I can do my work . . . my father does expect me to do that."

"He should have left things in better shape," said Sati. "He is a great man and I want to see him Emperor, but families come before crowns."

Prince Dara enjoyed his new suite and took on a somewhat more assured bearing in the interval of the two weeks before a courier from Agra brought the news that the court would proceed to the hills the next day, but one. March had come, warm and drowsy, and they would be several weeks on the way, camping at night and travelling in the daytime, so the prospect was tedious. But it was a relief to have the time set.

Salima's planning and Jahanara's growing knowledge made the packing and preparation much easier. It was an enormous undertaking, even so, to assemble two weights of clothing for each wearer, because of the chilly weather they would find at first in Kashmir, and thinner things for the summer. Blankets, shoes, mattress rolls, curtains for

tents, everything to make travel as comfortable as possible, was jammed into the camel trunks.

Jahanara's own needs were simple. Her writing folio, something to use for children's lessons, if that fell to her, a few pieces of jewelry besides her thumb-mirror and crescent, and, daringly, the little volume of Persian poetry, slipped out quietly from the library shelves, without asking anyone's permission.

The loaded camels were sent in to Agra the day before, to be integrated into the order of march planned for the whole court. That day, too, one whole set of camp equipment, complete with tents and cooking utensils, rugs and cushions and tables, went ahead one day's march from Agra, with the Emperor's second steward.

The procession itself carried another full set at the start, so that at the end of each day, they would find a wilderness home waiting, and the one used the night before would go on past and be ready again the next night when they stopped.

There were many details, besides packing at Sikandra, to close the palace for the time they would be away. Dust covers to be put on the furniture, vaults to be filled and closed. The widows and women of the household and the pensioners were sent off to their people or to visit friends, who had cool underground rooms in which to spend the hot weather.

A few caretakers and watchmen would be left, but when, at dawn on the day of departure, Mumtaz Mahall

would ride out through the great gates with her family and her secretary-companion and all their attendants, the waterfall in the garden would be hushed and the long summer quiet would descend.

Jahanara imagined how it would be on the last evening, at sunset, when she eluded the children once more and sat on the seat beneath the rose trellis. She had been too busy, since she had last sat there, to do more to the scraps of verses which were then beginning to grow in her notes.

Perhaps it was just as well that Zebby had discovered a game in the elephant verses. It might help while away the journey for all the children, cooped up for hours at a time as they would be on the swaying seat of a howdah. They had a list of twenty things now that an elephant might do, some of them wildly improbable, which they imitated by making a motion or an appropriate noise at the end. They thought it fun and they might think of more for the list on the journey. "The Emperor's elephants squeak softly," they'd chant, and then everybody would squeak, shrilly, in unison.

She smiled and sniffed the smell of fresh water and grass and the heavy scent of roses at evening. "I'll remember this when we are in the dust of the plain," she thought. It would be a good smell to remember always, wherever she was.

It was then that she was conscious of a tiny sense of alarm. Nothing had been said about plans for the family after the visit to Kashmir. She herself had taken it for

granted that they would return to Sikandra, and life would go on in the pattern now accepted. She had chosen clothing to take and had packed on that basis. Where would they go if they shouldn't return here? Would her father send for them to join him in the Deccan? Oh, oh no, this was home!

Jahanara sat a moment longer, thinking it over. It would be something to ask her grandfather Asaf Kahn, who was to meet them in the hills.

The Emperor Jahangir's family knew of a certainty that he was quietly failing that summer. The whispers of the court mentioned asthma. Perhaps the ascent of the hills had been too much for him. Or perhaps the higher altitude of the lovely Kashmir valley was a greater strain for him than it had been on other holidays.

After a month, no plans were made for more than a day at a time. Court ceremonial fell off. In the palace on the Jhelum River the doctors were more frequently greeted than courtiers, and Nur Jahan gradually began gathering decisions into her own ambitious hands.

Prince Khurram's children were not conscious of the portents. Young Nurse took them on day-long excursions, to the gardens, by the boats on Dal Lake, and one day they climbed to the top of Solomon's Hill and said their prayers in the little mosque there. They grew brown and round and healthy and Mumtaz Mahall commended the young nursemaid whom she seldom saw.

Her own attendance at court among the inner few was

imperative. Jahanara learned from Sati-un-nissa how grave everything had become. "The Empress has arranged for the marriage of your young uncle Shah Riyar to her daughter — her first husband's child. She wants him to succeed Jahangir."

So now they knew. The things Mumtaz Mahall had said on the day of Jahanara's presentation at Agra were showing their significance. Prince Khurram would have to fight for the throne if he became Emperor, and he was in the Deccan.

But when the chill of autumn frosts came to the beautiful valley, the old Emperor was still alive and able to travel, so the doctors said, and he advised the court to prepare for the long journey back to Agra.

All the packing was done once more and the extra set of camping things moved with precision, a day's march ahead of them, as before, down the mountain roads.

They reached Bhimbar on a beautiful October evening, the twenty-eighth of the month. They had come to the beginning of the plains road. Travelling would be much easier for everyone, the court assured itself, meaning the old Emperor, after they moved on again. They did not know that it was to be their Emperor's last camp, when they came in sight of the cheerful red and gold tents, gleaming in the midst of a huge mango grove under a gorgeous sunset.

The camels swung along more briskly and the elephants knelt and gave up their riders to the comfort of the tents. A little ripple of relaxed, pleasant chatter began to run among the mango trees.

The bearers of the Emperor's litter, in which he had been lying quietly since four o'clock when they had stopped to give him some refreshment, moved with it directly into his bedroom. Within moments scarcely to be counted, Nur Jahan was back in the wide tent opening, crying out that her Lord was dead.

Mumtaz Mahall and her father, shrewd old Asaf Khan, acted swiftly and sent off a courier with a warning message to Prince Khurram at Junnar, in the south. The rider was away before the rest of the camp could stir from its shock.

The Emperor Jahangir, it developed, had often spoken of his desire to be buried in one of the Mogul gardens about India. It was not possible to return to Kashmir because of the cold weather setting in there. The nearest was at Lahore, another march. So the Empress decided to go there for the burial.

Under cover of the confusion in the camp, Asaf Khan made swift, intelligent plans. "We should be well away toward Agra by morning," he said, gravely, and Mumtaz nodded. "Eat and rest a little, as if you mean to fall in with the general plan to move on to Lahore. But gather the family and be ready. My sister's grief will not dull her wits entirely. If it occurs to her that she may have a chance to keep her power through Prince Shah Riyar's succession, she will not hesitate to seize Dara and Zebby for bargaining advantage with your husband," he explained, and Mumtaz nodded again.

So they slipped out of the Bhimbar mango grove at midnight, after a few hours' sleep, going as silently as

possible with camels bells muffled, and no doubt aided by the gold which Asaf Khan had known how to dispense into the right hands. The camels were his, and the *omrah* escort was from his own company. There were no elephants and only a few load-camels.

It would not be an easy journey.



ESCAPE

The Princess Merinza left a trail of tears all the way from Bhimbar to Agra, though she made the entire journey safely held in Jahanara's arms, on one or another of Asaf Khan's fastest dromedaries.

Her misery was two-fold. Added to a natural childish sense that something was wrong, which worried the grown-ups, there was a lack of physical comfort. Her little body ached and she refused the cold food which they were obliged to eat.

Asaf Khan was pushing south, with scant consideration for the ease of anyone, himself least of all. The soft,

pleasant camp life, which had made the up-hill journey bearable, was gone.

At first dawn they stopped for food and rest and it was then, with daylight revealing the meager equipment, that Jahanara grasped more fully the significance of their plight. Her grandfather's stern expression alarmed her.

He talked to the three women, his daughter and Sati and Jahanara, while they ate. "There is just one thing we have to think of and that is to protect Dara and Zebby. If they should be captured, it would go ill with Prince Khurram. The boys might not be harmed physically, but he would never sit on the throne at Agra."

Jahanara shivered . . . the boys could be harmed. Her grandfather was trying to make them aware of danger, but not to frighten them more than was necessary. He was their father's friend and knew Prince Khurram would make a better Emperor than the weak Shah Riyar. She dared not think of her father's anxiety, alone in the far south.

Asaf Khan was speaking again. "Our escape last night has given an extra margin of time for my planning. Each day's happening now will guide me what to do next, what road to take, or to double back. Each of you must remember, though you are women, that if we are attacked, you need to keep your minds alert. *Don't panic*. If you cannot yourself reach either boy or protect him with your camel, watch to see the direction in which he is carried away, so that we may in turn pursue."

He shook his head at them sorrowfully, and went away to order the camp to saddle again.

Because of that talk, it was easier for Jahanara to understand the things she began to notice daily from the height of her camel saddle, or from the tent when she should have been asleep, on the few occasions when they made a full overnight camp. Only two small tents were pitched at any time, affording the simplest cover between the little company and the stars. The *omrahs* must have slept in the open, rolled in their blankets, and Jahanara wondered if her grandfather slept at all.

There was very little cooking done. They all learned to eat in the saddle on the march, out of hand. It became difficult to keep clean because the supply of water they carried was dwindling and they could not get more until they were much closer to Agra — if they ever got there. That possible calamity never left Jahanara's mind for long, and she often wondered how it would feel to be put in prison by Nur Jahan or Prince Shah Riyar for having tried to help Dara and Aurangzeb escape being held as hostages. If only her father hadn't gone to the Deccan! But he couldn't know that his father would die of a chronic ailment so soon.

Only Merinza of all the children seemed to mind the dreadful food. To the others it was something new and untried. Eating cold bread with colder, greasy chopped vegetables rolled in it was only a novelty. Each day they were more and more grateful for the baskets of oranges and apples and nuts brought down the mountain from the lovely valley, now so far away.

There were no games played on this strange return

journey. Dara was silent and solemn and the old, wary, tight-lipped look had returned to Zebby's mouth. Jahanara grieved to see it since she had hoped it had been completely lost back there in the gardens, where he seemed like a little boy again, with no thoughts except for the moment.

The constant pushing pace and the short stops, the continuing and stronger atmosphere of apprehension, had a notable effect on all the children. They spoke in whispers and asked Jahanara a hundred questions when they could speak to her at all — questions she couldn't even try to answer, for the most part. But the questions made her know that they realized their own peril, in some degree.

Only the gay Roshan was really enjoying the long, agonizing, uncomfortable experience. She had taken to riding with the commissary camel, up and down the line of march. She helped to hand out the food with smiles and enough energy to make even the stony-faced *omrahs* break their trained hardness and smile back at her and urge their horses to greater speed.

After their third camp, Jahanara noticed that her grandfather was always the last man up when the line formed again. He seemed to have two chief concerns — to leave no trace of their campfires or the holes where tent poles had been thrust in, and to know the exact places of the boys in line — never the same position two days in succession. He became more cautious day by day, as the time lengthened and there was still no sign of pursuit.

"They could have circled us," he said anxiously. "They could be waiting at Sikandra. It is your father I'd rather see there to greet us."

Jahanara's mind gradually went numb. She tried to think of something more to add to her lines about the white horse of Ferghana, which she had never finished. But nothing would come, nothing but the dull ache of her arms because Merinza refused to stir out of their shelter.

The line was delayed for an hour one morning while Sati and Young Nurse walked along the pack-camels, searching for the leather boxes which contained some warmer clothing. Coats for the children and the women's fine Kashmir shawls were unpacked, welcome protection from the chill of early November, except in the bright sun of midday. Their spirits revived a little with the added comfort, and then their uneasy minds turned to the problem of fresh water. The rose-scented baths in marble pools at Sikandra seemed to belong to another life which they might never see again.

There were no landmarks along the way which Jahanara could recognize, and she had determined not to bother Asaf Khan with a single question that she could hold back, so she was surprised to be told, when they dismounted for a short halt at sundown one night, that with Allah's mercy, they would be at home the next day.

Asaf Kahn said, looking down pleasantly at the three pale, drawn faces of the women huddled over the little campfire, "If only I could be as sure now that Prince Khur-

ram will be able to come north as easily as we have come south!"

Jahanara wanted to scream, "Easily, Grandfather!" and to hold out her aching arms and her soiled hands with their broken nails and show him the awful grease spots on a once beautiful scarf and blouse and trouser-skirt. But she kept still, seeing the slow smile on Mumtaz' still lovely face, and hearing Sati's firm declaration, "Thanks to you, my lord, and Allah."

He sat down, slowly, on a cushion his serving man brought and lifted a cup to drink some hot broth and Jahanara saw his hand shake. And then she looked a little closer at his face and saw that his eyes were sunk far back in his head, and that the skin seemed about to be pierced through by the sharp cheekbones. The little thumb-mirror that she still wore, miraculously not lost in all the confusion of this crazy, nightmarish journey, told her that she didn't look starved or peaked from loss of sleep. If they still won through to Sikandra with the young princes safe, it would be due entirely to her grandfather's efforts.

She tried to say thank you but her throat tightened and the words were only a croak. Asaf Khan sensed some of her thought — must have, surely — because he nodded at Sati but he looked at Jahanara when he said, "Thanks to Allah first, may He protect us all, and then to all of us together."

When he finished the broth, he set the cup down, and gathered all their attention with his own piercing eyes.

"Now I have just one more difficult thing to ask of you. If my plan goes well, then credit that to Allah, too."

He motioned them to come closer and spoke in a much lower voice, while he outlined his plan for a move which he hoped would foil any surprise ambush at Sikandra.

"The boys will ride with me and my most trusted *omrah* when we leave here at midnight. The party should reach Sikandra palace gates at three in the morning, precisely. Some time before that, quietly, we four will leave the line and enter a side road I know. A courier I have sent ahead, just now, will be waiting there with fresh clothes for the boys. Then I will take them to a safe place where they will be well hid until Prince Khurram comes, may Allah protect him. When you reach the gates and the watch opens to you, you are to make the discovery that the boys are gone and openly accuse Nur Jahan of their capture. The news should reach Agra town by morning. That will be well."

He leaned to pat his daughter on the shoulder, encouragingly, and then he was gone, into the darkness.

Merinza was asleep when Jahanara lifted her to be carried out to the waiting camel string. One more short ride and by morning they would be at home, in their own beds. What a homecoming! How little anyone had foreseen the way it would be, she least of all from her seat under the rose trellis on the last night before they started to the hills in March. And then she remembered the ap-

prehension she had felt, and wondered if it had been a warning from her guardian angel to walk circumspectly and cautiously and not ask too much of life.

She mounted her camel, and the little sister, wrapped securely in a shawl, was handed up to her; then the camel driver eased the beast over into its accustomed place in the line. Jahanara did not try to see where the boys were riding. It would be better not to know if, against all hope, there might be an ambush and she should be questioned.

The stars glittered like diamonds in the blue dark above them and Jahanara, wide-awake, tried to match the camels' course with all those far-off lights. But it was confusing because she hadn't yet learned enough astronomy. So she was surprised when something white loomed up ahead on the right and she saw a ghostly glimmer that looked somehow familiar. After a puzzled moment, she identified it as one of the turrets on great-grandfather Akbar's tomb. They were on the home road and in a few minutes would be at the palace gates.

Her throat felt dry and contracted and sore when she stumbled up the stairs, later, hoping her shrieks and apparent grief had been convincing for any enemy ears to hear and wonder. As soon as the camel train swung in, the women had discovered that the two princes were missing. The whole thing had been done as planned, and it seemed successful. Jahanara herself had been completely fooled. She hadn't known which side road her grandfather meant and did not notice when he turned off into it.

She carried Merinza to her own room, telling Young

Nurse she would keep the child with her the rest of the night for fear she might waken and be frightened. And then she fell on the bed beside Merinza, pulled their shawls and the coverlet over them, and thought drowsily that baths could wait until morning. They had waited for them so long that a few more hours wouldn't matter.



WHO IS TO BE EMPEROR?

Tongues wagged and questions flew as soon as the news of the old Emperor's death had time to travel down from Lahore and be sped by courier across the Ganges valley.

What would happen now?

The peasants in the fields asked it, and the *omrahs* attached to small estates outlying from Agra, anxiously wondered. Courtiers in Agra looked at each other and shrugged their shoulders. One did not dare, at that short distance from the throne, express one's loyalties aloud. Wait and see who would win, those shrugs seemed to imply.

Merchants as well as their customers, were more voluble in the open-fronted shops in the bazaar where betel nut was sold for chewing. They spat and some even swore to emphasize their opinions, which they gave freely.

But opinions were not answers, and those could not be given until someone in authority appeared, able to give them.

Would the lady Nur Jahan — who had been the power behind Jahangir's every act for so long — would she, could she, have her way and place Prince Shah Riyar on the throne? He was Prince Khurram's brother and married now to her daughter. Her choice would seem reasonably clear.

Some said that Shah Riyar had gone forthwith to Lahore to join his mother-in-law. The more fool he, others retorted. He should have stayed near Agra, to win in a fair fight, and not hide behind a woman's skirts.

Would Prince Khurram, known to be hurrying north from the Deccan, arrive in time to spoil Nur Jahan's plans?

Where were his young sons? It would be a smart move if Nur Jahan could imprison them and bargain with their father when he came — the throne for Shah Riyar in exchange for the freedom of Prince Dara and Prince Aurangzeb.

Perhaps she had tried, a listener suggested. No one seemed to know where they were.

That was a question for which Jahanara would have liked an answer. But would she be any better off knowing? Having trusted Asaf Khan all the way from Bhimbar to Agra, she'd have to trust him a little more.

The day came when she was glad she did not know what had happened to the boys. The rest of the family were back in the routine at Sikandra palace by that time, and the hardships of the homeward journey were becoming only an ugly dream, experienced a long time ago and far away.

Roshan had settled happily at her lessons, coaxed into submission by the praise she was sure to receive from her beloved Zebby when he returned. He had gone to visit their grandfather — “remember, Roshan, the one who let you hand out the bread from camel-back?” — he would come back when their father did. Prince Khurram was even now on his way to them. It would be wonderful to see him, eh, Roshan? It hadn’t needed much persuasion and Jahanara felt a little guilty to deceive the child. But it was better than letting her grieve all day with nothing to do.

Jahanara’s own hands were full and Sati warned her against working too hard. But it was a blessing to fall into bed at night so tired that she went to sleep instantly and did not lie awake to let horrible imaginings keep her wide-eyed for hours. Why didn’t they hear from her father, for instance? Would he just appear one day, or send a courier? Alam, perhaps? Would he have changed much in these months away? It seemed so long.

There was a regular squad of *omrahs* at the gates now, instead of the tired old retainer who was all the watch they had needed before the trouble. Though the circumstances were different, throughout the whole estate

there was the same feeling of waiting for something which had prevailed when her father was preparing to leave for the Deccan. One was conscious of it as soon as daylight came and its presence was constantly beside one or was observed in the faces of the others who tried, as Jahanara did, to hide their anxiety.

On the morning that the strange troop rode up to the gates and demanded admission, there was no warning, no advance courier, no premonition, nothing to prepare the girl for the curt questions that were asked.

The *omrah* who was officer of the day brought the word to Jahanara in the library. "The lady Sati-un-nissa is coming to be with you. Your mother, the lady Mumtaz Mahall, asks that you receive this stranger. I am to say she is indisposed."

Jahanara was standing, regally, with Sati-un-nissa a few steps behind her, silent evidence of the dignity of the house, when the leader of the strange visitors came in.

The man had a letter which he presented formally. She had seen him before. It came to her where, as she read the curt letter. He was one of Nur Jahan's personal guard. Nur Jahan demanded the immediate surrender of the two young princes, Dara and Aurangzeb, to their grandmother's keeping "for greater security in these troubled times," the words ran.

Now it was clear why Asaf Khan had planned as he did. She must make this man believe in her own innocence of their whereabouts, particularly if Nur Jahan had returned to Agra.

She was reassured when she looked at the guard's boots. He had been riding a long way and he hadn't stopped to tidy himself before presenting the letter. The sight gave her courage. She turned to Sati. "These men have ridden far. Please order some refreshment for them at the gate." Then she turned to the amazed guard.

"My brothers are not here," she said, steadily. "It is strange you have not heard, when it is known in the Agra bazaars, that they were abducted from my mother's camel train when we were almost at our gates here, on return from Bhimbar. We have had no word of them since."

"You searched?" asked the trooper.

"As much as we had the power to do. We are only a few women in this palace now."

The trooper nodded. "Yes, my lady, we know about that. We also have heard the bazaar story but we had to know it from you as well. I shall satisfy the Empress that you have told me the truth. No one could look at you and think else."

He saluted and was ready to go when Jahanara motioned him to stay.

"You went to Lahore with my . . . with the Empress?"

"Yes, my lady."

"How did she bear herself?"

He looked surprised. "She was composed but full of grief." He hesitated, then added, "You are young, my lady. When the time comes you will bear yourself so. It is expected of one who is . . . of your line."

"Of anyone," said Jahanara. "I wanted to know if

the grief showed. My grandfather was . . . he liked children. He was good to me when I was a little girl. You may go, now."

She had now another unanswered question. How could grief show if scheming went hand in hand with it? What was it Asaf Khan had said — "my sister's grief will not dull her wits." But something had upset her plans. Jahanara had expected the search for the boys to begin long before now. It was another obstacle passed before Prince Khurram's arrival. Oh, Allah, let it be soon!

The chief *omrah* of the gate guard had disquieting news when Nur Jahan's troopers had had their refreshment and departed. One of them had told him while they waited for their leader that Prince Shah Riyar had proclaimed himself Emperor at Lahore.

It added another question. Where would the battle be fought? Had her father enough troopers? How hard a fight would it be? "May Allah protect them all," Jahanara whispered.

Meanwhile the mild November days and crisp, chilly nights were encouraging everything to bloom luxuriously. The roses had never been so beautiful, Jahanara thought, with a passing glance for the burgeoning bushes behind the library. She had finally rebelled at doing accounts in the stark, bare little place in the wing, and her ledgers were spread everywhere she could find a place to lay them on the book tables. It spoiled the looks of the room, but the old peace of it gave her courage to stick at something which did not grow more pleasant as she

learned. When a day's work was over now, it meant only a few more columns of figures added. There were no transactions in jewels to record of late.

It was not until late December, when Alam came with the longed-for news from Prince Khurram, that Jahanara learned where her brothers were hiding. It was such a simple answer that she wondered why no one besides Asaf Khan had thought of it weeks before. It was well that they hadn't, however. And she herself had had a part in it, unwittingly. Afterward she was able to chuckle at its absurdity, but on the morning Alam came she felt stupid.

She was conscious of the little flurry outside before it reached the library door. First there was the voice of the *omrah* in charge of the gate and then Sati's, a little excited, and another and that one made her face burn. She laid down her pen. It couldn't be . . . But the next moment she knew that it was. There was a letter, several letters, one of them for her, and all brought by Alam out of the Deccan.

The gate officer went back to his post. Sati-un-nissa hurried away with the letter directed to Mumtaz Mahall. That left Alam standing, irresolute, with Jahanara's letter still in his hand — the two alone in the library in a most unusual circumstance — but they had offended custom before, and ignored it now.

Alam said, still holding the letter, "You look just as I have imagined you a hundred times, my lady, except that you are more beautiful than I remember. Or is it that you

are a little sad, and it enhances your beauty? Oh, my lady, don't be sad! You will find in the letters that everything is going to be all right."

His voice was a caress, as much as if he had taken her in his arms. If only he would! But Sati might come back any minute. What was in her letter? Why didn't he give it to her? This was awful, to have so much love . . . nay, affection, for two men at the same time.

Alam offered the letter then and said, "Read it. I will wait. I have time."

So she almost forgot that he was there, while she read her father's note. It was brief but it said a great deal.

My dear Elder Daughter: The couriers have been riding back and forth and I have had news of you through Asaf Khan, by letter and in person. He has been here with me but is off now to Lahore to do a piece of work for me. Your grandfather is a clever man, and I am grateful to Allah for your escape and preservation at the time of the Emperor's death. I am following Asaf Khan to Lahore where I, and not that young upstart Shah Riyar, am to be proclaimed Emperor shortly; and then I shall see all of you at Sikandra in the greatest haste possible. Asaf Khan gives me great praise of you, my dear daughter. I will add my personal gratitude for all the things you have done for me, when I return. It was negligence on my part that Dara was not given

his own rooms before I left. As it has turned out, it was a most wise action of yours. Remember, in all of the absences, that I love my elder daughter devotedly.

Khurram

The tears were rising which Alam shouldn't see, but what could she do? She wiped them away and found he wasn't looking, because he had taken up a book while he waited.

She pondered over the letter a little, wondering how her father knew that Dara had a suite of rooms of his own. He had had them such a short time before they went to the hills and of course he hadn't returned to them. Dara might have written his father, but Jahanara doubted that he had. Yet, how would Asaf Khan know about the suite?

Never mind, it might be explained some day, and here was Alam to be entertained or talked to. She studied him as he closed the book and put it away. He looked older, more hardened, and he now had a tiny beard, which was vastly becoming. It made him look a little like someone she had seen before. It probably wouldn't tickle as much as her father's if he kissed her. She blushed. Couriers and courtiers bowed only, so there was no hope of a kiss.

Alam said, apologetically, "I wanted to get into my old quarters for some shirts I left and the door is locked. They say you have the household keys now. May I have that one or will you send someone to unlock it?"

Jahanara laughed. "It will be a wonderful excuse to

leave this dull account I am doing. I will come with you."

So they crunched their way across the gravel to the wooden door leading to the musicians' quarters. Inside there was a small hallway from which stairs branched, right and left to the upper floor. There were latticed gates across each stairway, and they were also locked.

"This is strange," said Alam. "We never kept these stairways barred when we lived in these quarters."

"And look!" said Jahanara. "On the left the steps are swept and clean. On the right they are dirty in the corners of the treads."

The building hadn't been lived in since the musicians had gone away with Prince Khurram to the Deccan campaign. But somewhere, someone was cooking a rich meat curry.

She said, making a swift decision, "I'm sorry about your shirts, Alam, but I'm afraid you shan't be able to take them. Can't you have some new ones made, somewhere? I think we aren't supposed to come in here. I shouldn't have opened the outside door."

It sounded as if she were chattering like a monkey, and she was astonished at the slow grin which began to spread on Alam's face upward from lips to eyes and expand into a throaty chuckle.

"Are you only just now discovering the secret? Didn't you know? I did want my shirts, but I can manage."

"Are Dara and Zebby up there? They are? How clever of Grandfather! They couldn't be safer, anywhere."

"It is a perfect place," Alam agreed. "No windows

on the courtyard side. Their own walled courtyard on the other, which the musicians used. Only one cook would need to know."

"How did you find out?"

"How could I help it? I was present when Asaf Khan told how he slipped out of line that night with the two boys to come in at the rear of the stables and everything was arranged before morning."

"When may we see them, do you know that?"

Alam shook his head. "Patience, my lady, a bit longer. If I am not to have my shirts, I must leave at once. I've a long way to travel before nightfall." He reached for her hand and turned it over and laid his lips in the palm, almost reverently. It was never done, but he had done it. "We've had so little time to talk, Jahanara," he said, softly, "but a day may come. There are things I must tell you. . . . Until then . . .?"

He didn't look back when he started for the gate and Jahanara could never remember, afterward, her whole life long, whether or not she had felt his beard when he kissed her hand.

She felt exultant, uplifted and floating all in one. No more work for that day. The brothers were safe and she had prepared their hideaway unknowingly. They must have a hundred emperor's elephant's tricks by this time. She looked at the solid wall as she locked the door and wondered what they were thinking at that moment.

In her room she read her father's letter again and realized belatedly, that she had another cause for great grat-

itude. It sounded as if there wouldn't be any battles, after all — that he was going to be Emperor without lifting his sword.

There was a postscript, though, that she had missed because she had been conscious of Alam, near her. The few words said that he had been ill and had been obliged to let others fight his battles for him, but that he expected to be with the family in a few weeks.

Somehow, someone had done something to help Prince Khurram reach the throne at Agra. Jahanara learned a little of it that night when Salima brushed her hair.

"They are saying in the Agra bazaar, my lady, that Prince Shah Riyar has met with an accident which has blinded him. No one seems to know how it happened. I never heard of a blind Emperor, did you? Now it will be your father. I am glad."

Jahanara felt her skin crawl. According to the letter from her father, Asaf Khan had gone to Lahore *to do a piece of work for me*. So her father had known how it would come about. Men's ways were not women's. They could never pray for both sides in a battle, as she had done. There had been no battle. What had her prayers accomplished? She felt flattened and weary and bade Salima stop the brushing.

But the maid had one more word. "They do say, too, that your cousin, Prince Khusru's son, has gone to Persia to live. It doesn't seem natural, giving up his own country."

Exile. Another safeguard for the throne. Salima must not suspect a thing. There was already too much gossip.

Jahanara said, evenly, "My mother changed her country. I think she has not regretted it. I am sorry about my cousin's decision. He is a nice boy." Nicer alive than dead, she added to herself.

But it was Alam who had left a kiss in her palm to-day. Was he a cousin, too?



SHAH JAHAN,
'LORD OF THE WORLD'

The musicians had new uniforms. That was the first thing Jahanara saw when the procession appeared at the entrance to the Agra Fort and moved slowly across the huge lawn to the Hall of Audience.

Preceded by his musicians and attended by his sons, his courier and many nobles, Shah Jahan, son of Jahan-gir, was riding in, to take his place as the new Emperor of his family's domain. He had won his title, Lord of the World, for his generalship years before in taking the fort at Ahmadnagar in the Deccan, but had never used it until now. He still seemed Prince Khurram to his eld-

est daughter who watched, with the other women of the court, behind the screens of their high balcony as was the custom.

Ah, there was Dara, riding alone, immediately behind his father. How handsome he looked, and how the people applauded him! He was now in his rightful place, in a ceremony in which his sister could have no part because she was a girl, as he had prophesied a year ago at her birthday outing in Rajah Jai Singh's garden. How little either of them had foreseen this day.

Behind Dara, and now coming into view, was a group of three, riding abreast on matching white horses — could they be of Ferghana stock? Aurangzeb was frowning. Sujah as usual seemed pleased with everything he saw, and not much impressed by anything. Morad looked so little on the big beast he rode and his turban was crooked. Unconsciously Jahanara's hand lifted, as if to straighten it. Oh, no, she couldn't, she was too far away. But somebody should.

The horses' trappings and harness glittered in the February sun. Jewels in handsome turbans, in neck chains and belts, more magnificent than any Jahanara had ever seen assembled in one place, caught the light and sent it back, multiplied beyond reckoning.

The robe Shah Jahan wore above his silk coat was new. Its heavy embroidery was studded with pearls, and faced with pale blue under the rich scarlet, a truly regal mantle. It rippled and glittered behind him down the black horse's back, and one could not tell where the cloak ended and the saddle cloth began.

The spray of jewels, wired stiffly upright in the front of his turban, made Shah Jahan look infinitely taller, so that he dominated the whole scene.

All the women except Mumtaz Mahal made loud and expressive comments as each rider came in sight.

Jahanara studied her mother's face a little enviously. Mumtaz had someone to love, someone to whom she could acknowledge her affection, bear his children, a Lord to be proud of, as in this moment when pride and joy mingled so clearly on her face. Her words of abnegation came back to Jahanara clearly, beneath the chatter all round her, as if her mother had only just now spoken them, and not a year ago — "I want him to have what he wants. He wants the throne." And now he had it. To-day he had publicly become the Emperor.

Along with envy Jahanara felt loneliness, even in the midst of that glittering company of women of the court, each in her best. And then, swiftly, she realized she was not alone. Somewhere here, dressed as beautifully as any other and wearing as many jewels, was Alam's mother, searching over the heads of those in front of her to find one face and to be content with looking, unable to claim him as hers before them all, the son she had borne who was coming into partial heritage so slowly because his father was . . . a Mogul prince?

She pondered it as she watched the nobles sweeping in, a wave of them, which divided and turned to right and left of the space in front of the Hall.

Banners flew from all the staffs round the tanbark ring beneath the wall of the fort. One could smell the

stirred-up dust there and the air behind the screen became overpowering, heavy with the mingling of many perfumes. Jahanara fanned some of it away with the end of her scarf, and tried to forget her discomfort by watching her father.

Was it disloyalty on her part to question his right to the place he was assuming today? To put out a man's eyes, so that he would be incapacitated as ruler of a kingdom was far different from fighting on a battlefield to see which side had the most power. What if Fate had fallen the other way and Prince Khurram had been blinded instead of his younger brother Shah Riyar?

She shuddered with the imagery in front of her lively eyes — her father groping uncertainly in his desk for things he could no longer see — the cascade of jewels, falling, separating, rolling away from the pitiful hands — no, please Allah, never. She gave herself a little shake to push away the unhappy questions. It was traditional custom in the Mogul dynasty to do away with obstacles to succession. Now perhaps there would be no more battles of any kind for a while, so that she could find an opportunity to help the new Emperor reform a few of the ancient Mogul cruelties.

There would be work in plenty, in any case. Her father's inheritance, the accumulation of crown property since Babar, the first Mogul in India, was breath-taking, almost past belief. The list of treasure, supposed to be accurate, stored in the underground vaults at the fort, was staggering. She had seen it within a few hours of the family's arrival to make their new home in the palace at Agra, ten days ago.

Everything else here at the fort was on a comparable scale, dwarfing the life they'd led at Sikandra down to the size of a village. Practically all the things one wore or used were to be had in the precincts from goldsmiths, silversmiths, saddlers, weavers, an endless list. There was plenty of work for all who wanted it and for some who did not.

A trumpet sound, clear and sweet, thrust through Jahanara's wandering thoughts and drew her attention to the scene below.

Shah Jahan had dismounted, and now he climbed to Akbar's pulpit. However rightfully or legally, or by what other means he had arrived there, as *Lord of the World* he had won the throne of the Moguls. There was no one now to deny him anything. He said it, aloud, in his proclamation, in sonorous words and emphatically, his fine voice reaching to the far corners crowded with listeners. The loyal ones shouted when he finished and the doubtful ones smiled and those who didn't care a fig masked their indifference for safety's sake, so that later no stealthy observer could accuse them.

Shah Jahan's reign had begun, that bright February day of 1628.

Nur Jahan, his father's widow, had not come to hear his proclamation. The week before, she had been allowed, graciously, to return to the Jasmine Tower and to take away with her what was her own private property — the jewels she had brought as dowry to her marriage with Emperor Jahangir, her clothing and the mementoes of her husband's sixteen-year-reign. Mumtaz, still occupied

with settling her family into new quarters, bade Jahanara greet the former Empress for her and assist her when she came, if she needed help. Jahanara was reluctant, remembering other occasions and their bitterness, but she need not have feared.

Nur Jahan was a proud woman, and she behaved as if she were doing Shah Jahan and Mumtaz a great favor by arriving in person to attend to the removal of her possessions. She left nothing in the Jasmine Tower rooms that she could possibly claim; and in time even the heavy scent she affected died away, to be replaced by the lighter ones which Mumtaz liked.

The elegant English coach, which the Emperor Jahangir had had copied from a gift brought by Sir Thomas Roe — ambassador of James the First in England to the Mogul court — bore Nur Jahan away out of their lives when the painful duty was over, both for her and Jahanara.

The original coach stood in a shed near the stables and Mumtaz and her daughters could ride in it if they chose.

When the court had settled down under the new Emperor, Jahanara found, with great delight, that the family would be able to do more things together in this new palace life.

The children's quarters were near their parents' now, and one of the Tower rooms became a family meeting place. It didn't happen all at once, but developed natural-

ly, until one lovely twilight, the elder sister looked around at the group assembled and realized with a lifted heart that it was so.

She learned, too, with a rueful shrug, that she was not to escape doing the separate family accounts which her father was not yet ready to give into the keeping of a strange steward.

"You have no idea, Nara," he said, wearily, "of the extent of the record system here. I shall not change it. Few could improve upon the great Akbar on that point."

He gathered up a long double necklace lying on his desk, and it swung from his hand while he talked. Rubies and pearls alternated in the chain, and there was a fine gold fringe tipped with tiny bells, to lie close around the wearer's neck. Shah Jahan leaned and threw it over his daughter's head and pulled it straight. "There! It does become you. I saw it this morning when on inspection. I thought you might fancy it. I don't know who wore it before you, but now it is yours."

"It looks to be a dowry piece," said Jahanara, knowingly, "and also very old. I wish we could learn its story. You have no idea?"

Shah Jahan shook his head. "It will not be a dowry piece again. That is one thing you will never need."

"Father!"

"That's the law."

"A most cruel one. You could change it."

"I could, but I shan't. I need you, Nara, I shall al-

ways need you. I can fill your life full. Marriage? Bah! That I have had a good one, a perfect one, does not prove they all are. No, my dear, be advised."

He did not wait to see the effect of his words or of his gift. Jahanara was grateful for the closed door. She hadn't had time to be suave and smooth and get what she wanted by wiles. She hadn't had a chance to prepare her campaign. He had surprised her.

She set the little bells tinkling. The necklace had a whole dowry's value in itself, if she knew stones, and she thought she did a little now. Surprisingly, she did not cry. She had made her first plea. It would not be the last.

Her father needed her, did he? She needed a life of her own, as well, but he hadn't thought about that, or had dismissed it as of little consequence. His scornful "Marriage? Bah!" proved that. But Auntie Rosebody, daughter of Babar, had married — that was before her nephew Akbar's cruel decree — and nothing untoward had happened at court because of it. She had become a writer, too, with a part in the family Memoir. There was a double precedent for Jahanara to use as argument when her next opportunity appeared. She'd be ready for that one.



A BUILDER'S DREAM

Shah Jahan did his duty by his Empire with a daily timetable that covered every imperial responsibility. He got up early to pray, and before seven o'clock he was at the Durshan — the great window which looked out of the fort on the river side, where any of his subjects who wished might see him and know that the empire was safe, because he was in residence and in health, for another day.

Later in the morning there was a public durbar where he listened to pleas for justice, with patient hearing and immediate decisions. Before the noon meal he conducted a private audience for the nobles, and visited his wife's office where her charities were dispensed.

There was another public audience in the afternoon, then evening prayer, and, sometimes, assemblies for special discussions or trials of unusual cases.

Before the public durbar in the morning it was his pleasure to watch an elephant fight on the great plain between the fort and the river or superintend the training of his many war elephants there. Added to these duties, he received couriers coming from and going to all parts of the country. He inspected the many household services and his new projects for the redecoration of the buildings inside the fort, and for adding new ones. He had an urgent idea to build a little mosque immediately.

He found time, too, to be with the family. For the first time, Merinza seemed conscious that she had a father, and she had to be coaxed by the tall man with the smooth beard and stiff-skirted coats to sit on his knee. The reward was compelling, to play with the long string of pearls hung about his neck.

One morning Jahanara was summoned to see her father. She found him eagerly studying an immense drawing spread out on his desk — one that she was sure had never been in the old folio she had organized so carefully at Sikandra.

On advancing farther into the room, she was astonished to see an enormous display of jewels, polished but unset, spread out on the floor. It was a gaudy sight, and for once their winking lights did not stir her admiration. She was even less moved when she learned what the drawing meant.

Shah Jahan was beaming. "Look, daughter! I need

your advice. I have decided to build a new throne, one suitable to the dynasty. The vaults are bursting with jewels. Why not use some of them and let other people enjoy the sight? Here and here —" he indicated on the drawing — "will be the pillars to uphold the canopy, encrusted with emeralds, and a pair of peacocks at the top of each one. We can duplicate in stones the exact shades of their tails. What a sight they will be! Perfect, eh? I mean to have a more splendid throne than any other Mogul before me, or any other monarch in the whole world."

Jahanara looked at her father with astonishment. This would be ghastly. She could tell with only a glance or two at the drawing that it would be nothing but a gaudy show, yet he really admired his idea. It was unbelievable. Always before he had shown good taste, in everything — his dress, his furnishings, and the most lavish displays of wealth.

"I agree that it would be graceful to share beauty, but not in this fashion," she said, firmly.

"You do not like it?" Shah Jahan was genuinely surprised, and not pleased.

"I do not, and I suggest that my mother has already said so."

Shah Jahan laughed then. He said, "She did have somewhat the same feeling you express, but it will not stop me. I, my Nara, am the Emperor."

He sat studying the drawing and laying out trial sets of stones in different places and Jahanara slipped out quietly, and was not missed.

How could he, she wondered let such a thing occupy

him when there were so many needy people in his empire? How could he?

She returned to her room and took off the heavy necklace she had put on that morning out of habit. Its weight seemed to mock her. But perhaps it was only the warmer weather coming on.

The weather changed almost overnight. The construction of the Peacock Throne, the elephant fights, and the audiences were interrupted by the annual plans for the trip to Kashmir to avoid the summer heat.

For three seasons the routine was not changed. The children were growing up and Dara was almost a young man. Aurangzeb continued to be difficult, but the childish fights had been given up for more subtle bickerings which left their mark in increased unfriendliness among the brothers, except for Sujah, who seemed to have no enemies, anywhere.

Two things startled the family in that February when their father had been Emperor for three years. Mumtaz Mahall was to bear another child in the coming June, and she was not going with them to Kashmir. Instead, she would accompany their father to Birhanpur in the south, where he must go because there was trouble again in that unhealthy spot. To win the south had been one thing, to hold it another; and now it had to be dealt with again.

Shah Jahan stopped his family's arguments and questions at the source. He said, looking at Merinza particular-

ly but meaning it for all the others, "You are to be good and go with Nara to the hills this season. Only Dara is going with me. He is older now than two of his grandfathers were when they were generals, with their own armies in the field. It is time he had a different holiday, or rather, no holiday at all. He must learn generalship too."

Jahanara thought, rebelliously, "Does he think it will be a holiday for me? Sati will surely go with our mother. I will have Salima and Young Nurse, and these five are more than a handful. How many *omrahs* will they send with us? If only Alam could be one of the officers."

But she couldn't hope for so much, and she took farewell of her mother with a despairing heart. Mumtaz said, "I am glad you will have Asaf Khan with you this year. He is getting older and he needs the hill air, as well as to see his estates there. I knew it would please you, so I accepted for you when he suggested it."

"You need the hill air, too, Mother. That Birhanpur trip will be hard for you, and they say there is so much sickness in the countryside. You should come with us."

"I can travel comfortably in the English coach. If your father needs me, that is the place for me, where he is. He is my husband. And I will try my best for your happiness, my child. Perhaps now I can do something about that marriage law."

"May Allah protect you!" was all Jahanara could say, chokingly.

And so they separated, northward and southward, for a portentous few months, they thought.

The days dragged for Jahanara, but eventually it was July in Kashmir. In the middle of the month a courier toiled up through Banihal Pass, and down to Srinagar City in the lovely valley, moving faster when he reached the long avenue which Nur Jahan had planted with poplar trees. He had to inquire his way, after he came out of the avenue, to reach the summer palace on the mountainside where Jahanara and the children were spending the hot weather.

He came to her, at long last, standing alone in the garden, where she had gone to watch the sunset light the peaks for that perfect moment before night drops between one breath and the next. She heard his boots scrape on the path and turned.

"Alam! You! Here!"

"Yes, my lady, I am come."

His voice was dull, his beard was full of dust. But he managed an apologetic smile as he held out a letter. "I came as fast as possible. This, from the lady Sati-un-nissa, will tell you why."

Fear shook her, then, and he caught her arm, thinking she might fall. "Oh, Alam, is . . . my mother . . .?"

"The baby died first," he said, heavily, still holding her. "Read!"

Sati-un-nissa had written briefly, just enough for Jahanara to fill in the rest, with Alam's help.

"I scarcely know where to begin, Nara. Your father should be writing you, but he sits like one in a dream, seeing no one, hearing nothing, not eating. The nobles closest to him say they cannot possibly

leave here for another six months. When we return we will bring her with us to rest somewhere nearby. I am so glad to have Prince Dara here. He is popular with the people and will be a great help to your father later. Your mother went to sleep very peacefully, Jahanara, still beautiful. Now you will have to take her place.

Sati

Jahanara's eyes brimmed and she held out the letter for Alam to read. He shook his head and gathered her closely in his arms, letting her cry out her first grief on his dust-covered shoulders. He smoothed her hair where her scarf had fallen away and whispered gentle words, to soothe her. But it was only as an elder brother might, or . . . and after one repeated phrase — *dear little girl* — reached her, she raised her face and asked, "What did you say? But Alam, I'm not a little girl."

He looked at her dully, but tried to smile. "You seem so to an Uncle. I have not offended you? . . ." he protested as she drew away and tugged at her scarf to cover her hair.

"Uncle? Is that what you said? What does it mean, Alam?"

"That they haven't told you . . . I don't know why I expected it, but I did. It means . . ." he hesitated and spoke more slowly, acknowledging with mingled pride and shame the truth of his birth, "I am a young brother of your father, that I am a natural son of the old Emperor Jahangir."

"Oh Alam! And I thought you . . . that we . . . I have liked you, very much, from the first."

"And I, you. I thought your father would tell you, surely, the day he made me his courier and asked me so many questions that the truth came out."

"I might have guessed. After you began to wear a beard, your likeness to someone I knew annoyed me because I couldn't place it. In time it will be more pronounced." Her tears flowed again. "Oh Alam. It is so strange. I will have to become used to it."

"As I have. Sometimes it is better not to know, but somehow I am glad, now that it is told."

"We can be natural now . . . as friends . . . for all our lives long."

"Friends!" he repeated her word, bitterly.

"Come," said Jahanara, "you are weary and hungry." She led the way into the house and gave the necessary orders for his comfort. "I shan't tell the children until tomorrow."

Alam could allow himself only the next day and night to rest before beginning the return journey with a fresh horse. He slept most of the time, so there was no opportunity, with the children's grief upon her, for Jahanara to talk with him again.

She felt numb and bruised, as if she had rolled down the mountainside and had hit every outcropping stone on the way. But because the children and Asaf Khan had to be comforted, she could not think of her own griefs — no one need know that she had two, each alone overwhelm-

ing, for Alam was now as lost as if he too were lying lifeless in the south. Alam, my own dear love, she whispered, lying awake on the night of his arrival. What did other girls do with such a grief and without a mother to turn to? What did they *do*?

For her there were other, more immediate worries, the children's anxious questioning, Asaf Khan's grief, so different from her own, yet bound with it. And there was her father — and Sati's behest to take her mother's place. It might help him if there were something definite to distract his attention from the poignant memories everywhere when he should return from the Deccan. What should it be? Surely now he would find no solace in continuing the work on that gaudy throne.

On one particularly long, sleepless night, Jahanara began to think of another part of Sati's letter — *some place nearby*. At Sikandra there was the loved garden, but at Agra there was that other garden, borrowed for the day, where they had held her birthday celebration four years ago when she was fourteen. If Rajah Jai Singh could be persuaded to sell it . . .

The next morning the negotiations began, by courier, and when Jahanara and her grandfather and the children reached Agra in October Rajah Jai Singh had been persuaded to make over the ownership to the Princess Jahanara, *for the purpose of holding a tomb, henceforth*.

What form should the tomb take? Jahanara felt she dared not leave its planning to her father, not after seeing his ideas for a suitable throne. She searched for the old

folio of building drawings and spent secluded hours neglecting everything else until dome and panel and minaret began taking shape dimly on her scraps of paper. There was to be nothing of the garish throne style in this memorial to her mother.

Eventually, she took her drawings to the carpenter and the jeweler and the goldsmith in their cubicles beneath the walls. They looked at them approvingly and began making tentative sketches of their own.

"No, not sketches. I want something the Emperor can pick up in his hands and take apart, to see the structure, to help him imagine," Jahanara urged.

"You need something more than our skill, my lady," said the jeweler. "You should consult the Italian at Surat. They say he is skilled at such as this. Perhaps he will listen to you."

"Let him come here, then," said Jahanara, and took up her pen and sent off another courier, desiring the Italian's presence at the court in Agra.

The Italian, Verroneo, came, surprisingly, for she had feared he might not think such a trip worth while. He entered into her plans sympathetically, too, so that the little model began to grow on the desk in Shah Jahan's study. It was a perfect little thing, each part fitting into the whole, and when it was finished the Italian set it on a piece of paper and drew a diagram about it, to show how he would enhance it with a garden.

The goldsmith had tipped its tiny minarets with real leaf and the jeweler had drawn designs for jewelled mo-

saic insets on the portal, and on the marble panels inside.

The Emperor returned before the end of the year, and the English coach followed him. It bore a precious burden. Mumtaz, still riding in comfort, had come home.

Her husband's beard was white and the sparkle was gone from his keen eyes, but his face brightened a little when he saw Jahanara. She drew him into the study and let him discover her work for himself.

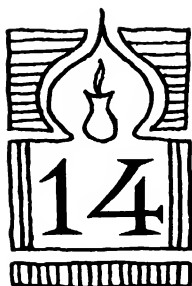
He sat down at the desk and took up the little model in his hands, wonderingly. Then he looked down at the place where he had found it and noticed the landscape drawing.

"In a garden," he breathed. "Perfect, but where, Nara, hereabouts?"

"That too, is perfect, my father," Jahanara said, steadily, "thanks to Rajah Jai Singh. He is our friend. He sold his garden to me when I told him that once we were happy there, all of us together."

She handed him the written agreement by which Jai Singh had conveyed his garden for a price, but with his sympathy.

Shah Jahan said, "It seems a long time ago, now, Nara, that I told you I needed you. Can you doubt it? I thank you for this gift, my daughter. This we shall build. I must speak to the artisans."



DEDICATION

At evening on the day of her father's return, after they had arranged for a temporary resting place for the precious burden brought in the coach, Jahanara climbed to the room in the Jasmine Tower which had been hers since her mother's death.

It was a quiet place, high above the river and removed from the sounds of the busy inner life of the palace and the fort. Here were the treasured furnishings that she had found in her first separate room at Sikandra, the rug, the hangings, the bed cover, the chests, together providing sanctuary for her troubled spirit.

She sat for a long time on a cushion on the floor by a low window sill, looking down on the river and out at the darkening sky where a little sickle moon hung low, caught within the arch of her casement.

Her work was done and her hands were empty. The completion of the little model for the tomb, and her father's acceptance of the gift, had somehow made her mother's passing at last a reality. While she was working on the plan, coaxing the best from each artisan, littering her desk with her own sketches and scribbled ideas, she had kept that finality away.

Now it was here. She folded her arms on the window sill and rested her head against them and had no idea that even her strong young body could not keep to the pace she had set herself in recent weeks — to finish the model before her father's arrival, without yielding to weariness — and that that now in part emphasized her grief.

Oddly, it was Alam's face she saw in the twilight rather than Mumtaz's beautiful, serene countenance, and she cried out again, as she had in the hills in July, "What does a girl do when she has no mother to comfort her?"

Concentration on work had helped to keep the fact of Alam's relationship at bay, too, but now it rose, to be dealt with again. Now she would probably see him often, as his work brought him to the palace. How would he bear himself? How would she? If her father knew that Alam had told her his identity, perhaps he might be

brought into the family group. Dara had not come home with his father, and Sati and Morad and Sujah needed an elder brother. Jahanara sighed. Perhaps, in time, she would find that a very young uncle could acceptably fill the place of a beloved elder brother. It all rested with the Emperor. Alam, my dear love!

The little moon slipped farther down the sky and the river water lapped gently against the walls of the fort far below and Jahanara slept.

It was quite dark when she woke, and her neck was stiff. The sliver of moon was gone and Salima had not come to brush her hair, or perhaps she had and had gone away again without disturbing her mistress. Jahanara stayed on her cushion a few moments longer, wondering if she had dreamed or was she hearing the gazelle song? She listened and it came again, from somewhere far off so that it was only a thread of sound, perhaps from a lonely boatman out on the river. But the tune was unmistakable and she could supply the words, sung so happily that day of her birthday party in the garden borrowed from Rajah Jai Singh. The scene came back to her mind, vividly, the children, the feast, the beauty of the camp, the musicians on the barge and Alam, helping her to step out on land. There was her father's concern for his children's pleasure and their mother . . . quiet and beautiful and happy that day, *but she brought her work with her*, Jahanara remembered.

And four years later Sati had written her from that fateful town in the Deccan, *now you must take her place.*

Jahanara rose, gracefully, when the singer in the boat had drifted too far downstream to be heard. She groped for a candle and lighted it and sat down at her overflowing desk, frowning at the untidiness. Somewhere in that mass of scraps and sketches and scribbles, there was the beginning of an idea that had come to her one day in the artisan's quarters when she had stopped to watch the weavers. The model had absorbed her and she hadn't finished the idea because the conclusion eluded her. It should be here . . . somewhere.

Ah, the last of a pile, in worse order than she had remembered it, on the back of an unfinished sketch of a panel for the inside of the tomb . . . she bent closer to the candlelight to study the idea she had had about the pattern of life, as people wove it, much in the way the weaver made designs in shawls and carpets. Her pencil hovered, scratched out, retrieved a word discarded earlier, and then the last word came, the insistent idea which had sent her from the window sill to her desk, because she had remembered that her mother had taken her work with her to the birthday outing. Dedication, that was it, to something believed in and bound to it by conscience and even destiny, perhaps.

She read it aloud, softly, to hear the cadence.

Life

*Joy in it, love in it
Marking the pattern—
Words in it, Tears in it—*

*Time is a glutton,
Robbing the length of it,
But not the strength of it.
Let nothing tarnish it
Through inattention!
Stars in the woof of it,
Songs in the toil of it,
Gemmed be the whole of it
By dedication!*

Jahanara smiled, waveringly, and felt satisfied that the lines said what she meant, though *dedication* was a strong word, if the lines were to describe her own life. She was only eighteen.

But, if that word was for her, it wouldn't matter now whether or not her mother had been able to persuade Shah Jahan to revoke his grandfather's marriage decree. Rather, it was for Jahanara to put that hope behind her, forever. What if the decree were rescinded tomorrow? That wouldn't change her father's need of her, strengthened now by the death of her mother. If he should allow her to marry, he would want to dictate the person of her husband, so as to keep her near him at court. She would have no choice. And there were the children. They needed her, too. She couldn't leave them.

So, if she chose to let the poem mean her own life, *dedication* would not mean merely to her mother's deserving poor.

And, she chided herself, Alam will be at court and

visible; and would you want to marry anyone else, having known him, as you have, even a little? Would you, Jahanara?

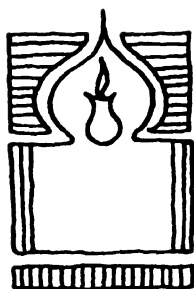
She pulled at a drawer handle, to put her new poem safely away and it resisted, so she pulled harder and it came out too quickly, so that everything in it spilled on the floor. If only Salima hadn't been so kind, she thought, childishly, she might have been here now to help pick up these things. But if she had been here, I wouldn't have finished my poem. Oh dear, there was more in life than noble renunciation and stars and the rest of the things she had put in the verses. Annoyances like this.

And then she forgot her irritation born of her great weariness, because she was looking at the little case, lying on the floor, which Roshan had so patiently stitched for The Nine Days Bazaar all those years ago. Three of her greatest treasures were kept in it. She picked up the case and drew them out — Alam's two notes, creased so often that they were almost illegible now, and the falcon's feather which had clung to her glove that bright morning of her birthday celebration four years ago.

She smoothed the feather with a loving hand, the barbs forming the perfect arrow which she had taken to mean an omen for the future she wanted. Instead, it must have meant that, as she rode by her father's side that day, there she would remain in all the years ahead, his trusted ally in every project, his faithful elder daughter. *Dedication*. Her omen.

It was something to brood upon, to think about. But

she heard a tap on her door, and she hastily thrust case and feather and notes into the drawer. It was not as late as she had thought. Salima had come to brush her hair.



A FINAL WORD

The Mogul dynasty was founded in India by the Emperor Babar in 1526. He was an Asiatic Turk of Samarkhand, fifth in direct descent from the great Timur, the Lame. The word *Mogul* is said to be a contraction of *Mongol* and there was some of that inheritance introduced by a lineal descendant of Genghis Khan — a princess — but inasmuch as the Jagtai Turkish strain of Timur, as distinguished from the Constantinople Turks, was the stronger, the family always claimed the superior ancestry.

The splendid brilliance of all the Mogul courts did not wholly conceal the barbaric, even primitive cruelty

of some of their customs, which affected everyone in the kingdom, from a princess to a peasant. No woman's life, certainly, was her own, being equally circumscribed in palace or farm hut or town hovel.

That the princess Jahanara achieved her own place in her generation, in her family and in history, is a tribute to her personal character. In a period when the education of girls was unusual, and their consequent mental resources shallow, she became a noted poet and artist and later, through a large private fortune, a great charitable benefactor. Her father, Shah Jahan, is known as the Mogul Builder, but there are many evidences that he was influenced by his daughter and accepted her skill in design. She was the architect and donor of the beautiful mosque at Agra, built in 1644.

It is difficult to estimate now, three centuries later, how much thwarted romance went into Jahanara's poetry and helped to bring out her artistic ability. She might, indeed, never have been heard of in quite the way she is known, if the Emperor Akbar, her great-grandfather, had not decreed before she was born that thereafter Mogul princesses should not be allowed to marry. It was a cruel law. But the Moguls did not dare trust anyone too much. Though power walked with them all the way from Babar to Aurangzeb, fear was their constant shadow. Sons-in-law might get ideas of equality and demand the same recognition as sons. There were several incipient romances in Jahanara's life but each was somehow discovered by her fa-

ther and ended, forthwith. Poison was cheap and poisoners could be bought. If Prince Dara, her favorite brother and a man popular with the people, had succeeded to the throne, the cruel decree might have been revoked, because there is historical basis for a promise he made to his sister that he would do it, when he could.

Jahanara was only eighteen when she lost her mother and so became her father's chief comfort. She helped him design the Taj Mahal, the now famous tomb at Agra, as a memorial for the beautiful Queen Mumtaz. At the end of Shah Jahan's life he too was laid in the crypt beside his Queen.

Before that happened, Jahanara had seen each of her four brothers set themselves up as independent sovereigns, and had mourned for the three whom Aurangzeb — the Zebby of the story — defeated and killed in his fight to become the next Emperor. He imprisoned their father in the Jasmine Tower, where the aging ruler lived for seven more years, attended faithfully by Jahanara.

Aurangzeb gave India a weak reign. Gloom settled on his court when he abolished many gay customs, one of them The Nine Days Bazaar. He had no ability as a general, his personality was forbidding, his outlook on life bleak, for all his religious studies in his youth. When he was near death he wrote "My years have gone by profitless. God has been in my heart, yet my darkened eyes have not recognized his light."

Throughout her long life — she lived to be seventy —

the Princess Jahanara's heart was bright with love for her family and for needy people. The field of her charities was wide, so that her life stands forth beautifully in an age of cruelty and power-seeking.



JEAN BOTHWELL lived in India for two years, where she taught history—a background which richly qualifies her to write of Jahangir and her way of life in the seventeenth century. She travelled widely during her stay in India and, while in Lucknow, lived in an old official residence which had once belonged to the Treasurer of the Kings of Oudh. “There was a lot of talk about buried treasure around the place,” she recalls. “When the mists thickened after sundown appeared, I used to imagine them the wraiths of the lords and ladies who once lived there.”

Miss Bothwell was born in Nebraska, the daughter of a Methodist minister. She prepared for a teaching career at Nebraska Wesleyan University, and taught history in the United States before going to India.

Now a resident of New York City, and a full-time writer, Miss Bothwell is the author of more than thirty books for young people. Her titles include *RANCH OF A THOUSAND HORNS*, written with Phyllis Sowers, and *A TREE HOUSE AT SEVEN OAKS*, as well as other historical novels.

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London New York Toronto

